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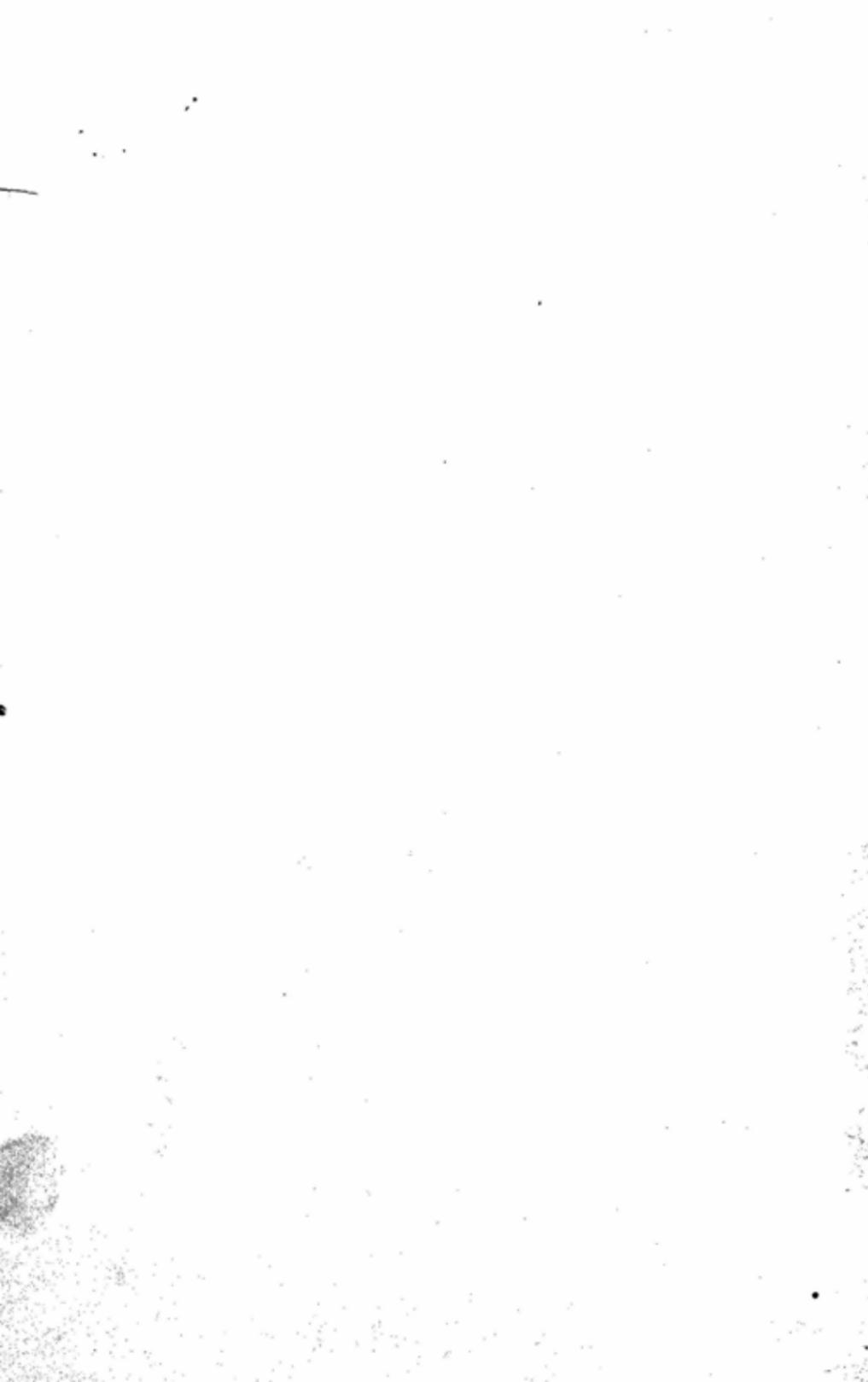
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# THE PURPLE BARRIER

*The Story of the Great Wall of China*

*By the same Author:*

The Stars in Our Heaven  
Fabulous Beasts  
Peking—1950-53

# THE PURPLE BARRIER

*The Story of the Great Wall of China*

by  
PETER LUM

28377

ILLUSTRATED



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London  
ROBERT HALE LIMITED  
63 Old Brompton Road S.W.7

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First published in Great Britain, 1960

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LIMITED, THE  
TRINITY PRESS, WORCESTER, AND LONDON

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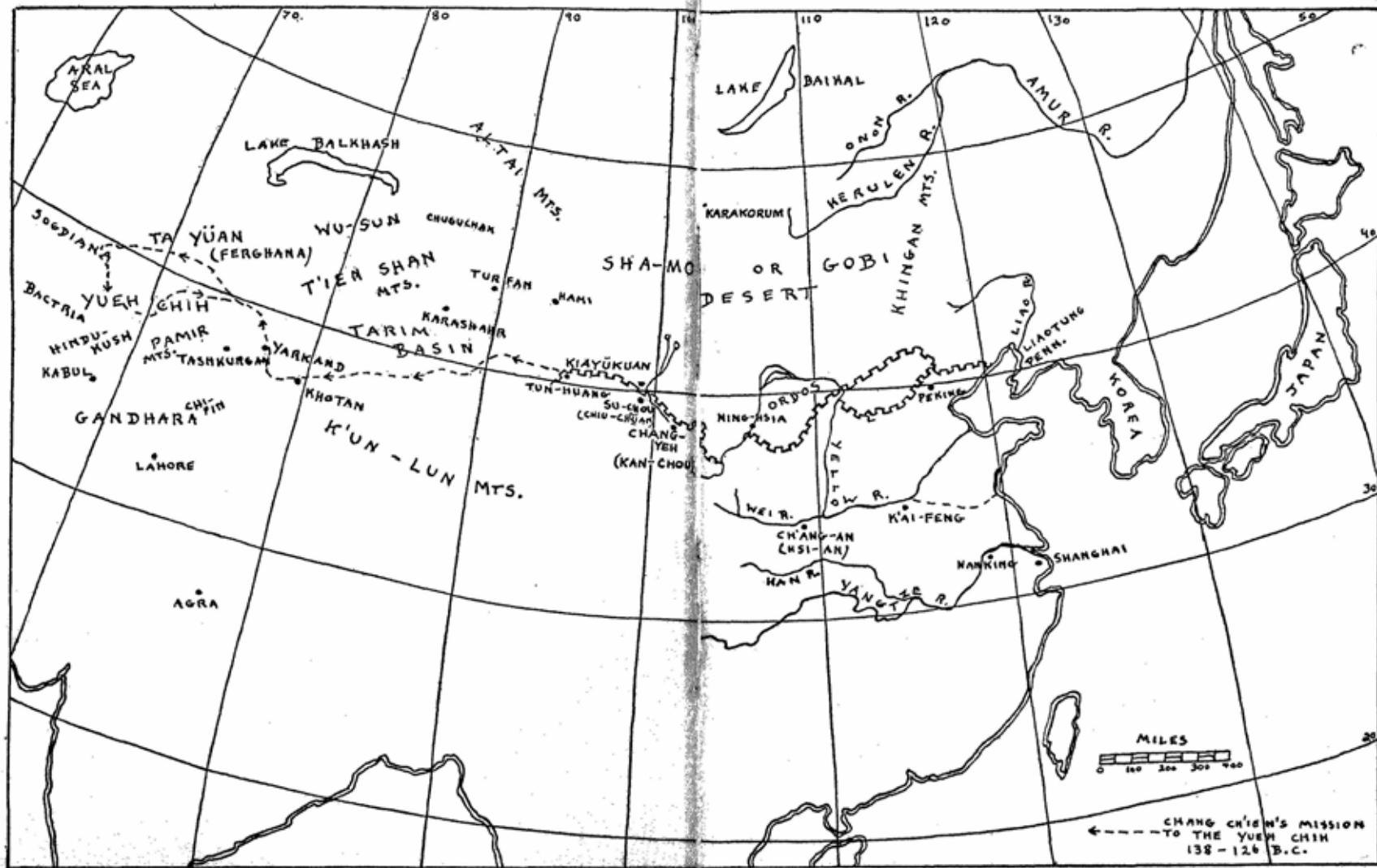
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PREFACE

IT IS almost impossible to tell the story of the Great Wall without being swept aside into the long and complicated stream of Chinese history. Every dynasty through two thousand years and more was to some extent concerned with the Wall. But I have tried to leave history in the background and to concentrate on the Wall itself, its principal architects, and the many curious episodes in which it played a part.

Why should it be called the Purple Barrier, when the barrier is beyond doubt grey, or perhaps yellow-grey in the dusty western regions? Some say that the colour of the earth during the Ch'in Dynasty, when the Wall was first built, was truly purple; others that it was so-called because the grass at Yen-mén Kuan, one of the main fortresses of the Wall, has a purplish tinge. More likely, some early literary allusion may have caught the fancy of later poets.

Chinese names are difficult at best. For the most part I have relied on Giles' Biographical Dictionary for the spelling of personal names, and on Hermann's Atlas of China for place names. In such a popular work I have not hesitated to use the names most familiar to western readers: Genghis Khan rather than Chinghis. For the same reason I have used the name by which each Emperor is best known—T'ai Tsung, Yung Lo or Ch'ien Lung as the case may be—throughout, although in many cases this is the title of the reign rather than the name of the ruler.



## CHAPTER ONE

### ON WALLS IN GENERAL

THE GREAT WALL has become so much a symbol of China that for many years Marco Polo's account of his journey to the land he called Cathay was discounted because he did not mention the Wall. He did not mention the habit of drinking tea, either, or women with bound feet, so perhaps it is not surprising that some critics refused to believe he had ever been in China. Marco Polo must have crossed the Wall. But at that time, when the Mongol empire stretched from Europe to the China Sea, and from the borders of India to the Arctic, the Wall marked no boundary and served no defensive purpose. The "barbarians" of the north, against whom it had already then stood sentinel for fifteen hundred years, had conquered not only China but half the world. The Wall was of less importance, either strategic or symbolic, than at any other period in its long history.

Seeing the Wall as it stands today near Peking, the great, grey rampart that stretches from mountain peak to peak as far as the eye can see in either direction, its fortresses standing guard over seemingly impassable heights, it is yet hard to understand how anyone could have overlooked it. In places indeed it seems almost a natural outcropping of the rock, following every contour as though it were neither more nor less than the spine of the mountains; but in others its crenellated silhouette stands out in stark contrast to the hills. It climbs above summits which no horseman was ever likely to attempt. It sweeps precipitously down from these into the valleys. It disappears in the shadows only to reappear on some higher, further peak of a more distant range. It is said, on what evidence I do not know, that this is the only feature of the earth's surface built by the hands of man which would be visible to an observer on the moon, and possibly on Mars.

Its dimensions are impressive. From the sea coast at Shantung to the last desert fortress of Chiayikuan in Central Asia it traverses four of the eighteen provinces of modern China, Hopei, Shansi, Shensi and Kansu, a distance of roughly fifteen hundred miles as the crow flies. Its actual course, circuitous and in places positively wayward, sometimes taking advantage of the terrain and sometimes deliberately not doing so, covers well over seventeen hundred miles; or two thousand, five hundred if one includes the inner and outer

loops, double walls, and walls projecting at right angles to the main line.

The common Chinese name for the Wall is Wan Li Ch'ang Ch'êng, or Ten Thousand Li Long Wall. A "li" being about one-third of a mile, this would mean roughly three thousand miles if taken literally—an exaggeration, although perhaps no more than poetic licence would allow. But "wan", or ten thousand, is more often used in a figurative than a literal sense, meaning a myriad or infinite number. The title probably refers to great length rather than to any exact measurement.

Statisticians have estimated the cubic content of the Great Wall at Nankou Pass to be 422,400 cubic feet per mile, and concluded that the cost of construction in the twentieth century would be something like £35,000 a mile. Moreover, modern engineers would probably have to use much the same means of construction as did the engineers of two thousand years ago; no new techniques could replace the vast human labour required. Mr. Barrow, the historian who accompanied Lord Macartney's mission in 1793, was so overcome by the sight of the Wall that he did some rapid calculations of the amount of material it contained and came to the conclusion that it was greater than the total amount of masonry in all the houses (which he estimated then as one million, eight hundred thousand) in England and Scotland.

Presumably Mr. Barrow based his calculations on the measurements of the Wall where he visited it, north of Peking, multiplying these by the estimated length of the Wall. In these eastern sections the height of the Wall varies from fifteen to thirty feet, and its width from twenty-five feet at the base to about fifteen feet at the level of the upper platform. This platform or *terreplein*, protected on either side by crenellated parapets, is theoretically wide enough for five or six horsemen to ride abreast but it could never have been easy riding, for in many places the Wall rises so steeply that it was impossible to have an inclined ramp and the *terreplein* had to be built in steps. The core of the structure here is of heavily tamped earth and stone, faced with a layer of brick nearly two feet thick, and set on a stone foundation, many of the stones being huge granite blocks fourteen feet long and three or four feet wide.

If other travellers were sometimes less impressed than Mr. Barrow, it was because they approached the Wall from the west. There, instead of this solid earth and stone core encased in brick the Wall is more often built of loess, faced with a single thickness of stone, or even of loess moistened, pressed into wooden forms and left unfaced. Loess, the fine, dusty yellow earth characteristic of Shensi, is easily worn away and the fierce winds from the desert constantly levelled

and eroded the walls there, or buried them under drifting sand. Quickly built, they were quickly destroyed. The Abbe Huc in the nineteenth century crossed the Wall several times in the west and commented that in some places it was difficult to recognize it as a wall unless you were looking for it, while in others stones had been carelessly heaped up, without mortar, in an attempt to preserve the line of the rampart. So ruined and so worn down were parts of the famous earthwork that he could ride across it without dismounting.

This contrast emphasizes that the Wall was never by any means of equal importance nor equally well maintained everywhere. Although the furthest western outposts and fortresses, on the threshold of Central Asia, were usually kept in good repair and heavily garrisoned, long stretches of the western Wall were neglected for centuries at a time, being rebuilt only when there was danger from the far west or when China herself was expanding westward. It was the section of the Wall running from the loop of the Yellow River eastward to the sea that was the main concern of Chinese rulers. In that area walls were built upon walls, repaired, extended, now pushed further north and now withdrawn south, until it would be impossible even to trace the foundations of every wall.

The building of the Great Wall is usually said to be the work of the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti in the third century B.C. Undoubtedly Ch'in Shih Huang Ti was the main architect of the Wall in the sense that it was he who first determined to construct a single rampart that would both define and defend the whole of China's north and north-west frontier, it was he who, at a terrific cost in human life, accomplished this vast project in less than twenty years, and he who thereby drew a definite line for the first time between what was China and what was not. But the greater part of the Wall as it stands is not the wall of Shih Huang Ti. It is rather like some great English cathedral, with a history twice as long; the basic plan and a certain amount of the structure belonging to one period, say Norman, with earlier bits of Saxon work, perhaps incorporating Roman brick, repaired, rebuilt and enlarged half a dozen times since it was first completed.

There is no neatly coloured ground-plan to show which bits of stone and masonry are third century B.C., which earlier and which later. Parts of the best-known sections of the Wall, those nearest Peking, were probably built in A.D. 555 and other parts during the Ming Dynasty in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the last great era of wall building. Except where a few of the late Ming builders have put up tablets to commemorate their work, it is difficult if not impossible to determine the date of individual stretches of the Wall.

But for the same reason it does not matter. There is no reason to think that building techniques altered essentially in the two thousand years of its history, and certainly the materials used in its construction were always the same brick and stone. If one were to stand now looking at the Wall at Nankou or Kupeikou and think—"This is how it must have looked when Ch'in Shih Huang Ti travelled along the frontier to inspect his new defences"—one would probably not be far wrong.

The earliest prototype of the Great Wall, a wall which marked a boundary rather than enclosing a city or encampment, is reputed to have been built before the first millennium B.C. This may have been only an outlying fortress or two, intended to discourage roaming tribes from attacking the central state; it may have been a low mud rampart such as one still comes across in remote parts of China or Mongolia; or it may have been a myth. But it is likely that the idea of building a wall to define and to protect their frontiers did occur to the Chinese at a very early date, and it is quite possible that tribal walls already existed during the Shang Dynasty (1500-1028 B.C.).

The Chinese are and apparently always have been excessively wall-conscious. Their earliest known settlements, well before 2,000 B.C., were surrounded by walls of tamped earth, and from that time down to the twentieth century a city without a wall was as inconceivable as a house without a roof. The same word means either a city or a city wall; you cannot have one without the other. Even Shanghai, that sprawling metropolis which foreigners usually think of as the largest city in China, is not, according to the orthodox, a city at all, unless you are speaking of the tiny walled city at its heart; the rest is an overgrown village, a trading centre, but not a city.

Walled cities are of course by no means confined to China. Probably every prehistoric and every feudal society has surrounded its encampments and its cities with walls. Wherever individual farmers banded together for security, to live and to store their grain safely from year to year, there would be walls. Wherever nobles or war-lords feared attack from their rivals, there would be walls. But the use and symbolism of walls became one of the basic elements of Chinese life, a part of the Chinese character. No other people have gone so far in surrounding their towns, their villages, their individual houses, their temples, and finally their country with walls. Probably only in China, too, has a wall of ice turned back an attacking army; and an Emperor seriously considered lacquering the walls of his capital to render them damp-proof, being dissuaded from this ambitious plan only when it was pointed out to him that it was im-

possible to dry lacquer unless the temperature could be kept absolutely even for several days at a time.

The present government of China, the Chinese Peoples' Republic, seems to be antipathetic to walls, and with their rapidly expanding cities and increased use of land many city walls probably have been or will soon be torn down. Yet there are said to be still some two thousand walled cities in modern China. The walled towns, too small to be called cities, must be beyond counting. Even the smallest villages, occupied by only a handful of families, their houses built of mud and their temples fallen in disrepair, have often preserved and kept up their walls through the centuries.

A city like Peking is a veritable maze of walls. Its Forbidden City lies at the heart of a series of walled cities, the Imperial City, the Tartar City, the Chinese City, like a set of Chinese boxes, and within the Forbidden City every individual courtyard is separated from another by walls. Walking along the smaller streets of the city, you walk for the most part with blank walls on either side. The gates in the city wall are reinforced by walled barbicans. Every temple, almost every separate shrine, stands within its separate wall; every courtyard in even the poorest house is enclosed by walls.

Since China, or the World Below, is only a reflection of the World Above it is also assumed that the cities and the palaces of Heaven are surrounded by walls. Moreover the God of Walls and Moats is an important deity, whose duty it is to notify human beings when the hour of their death, as inscribed in the official register of Hell, has come. The god's two assistants, Ox-head and Horse-face, then fetch the soul and escort it to a great hall on the frontiers of the Other World which belongs half to the God of Walls and Moats and half to the kings of the Other World. This hall is the actual dividing line between earth and the underworld. Each soul is brought in from the one side when his time comes, to be met on the other side by the otherworldly spirits who have been appointed to conduct him through those judgement halls of Hell which every man must pass.

Individual Gods of Walls and Moats also preside over all towns and districts, keeping the register of their residents, protecting them, and being responsible to the Jade Emperor for their welfare. A story is widely told in China of the human prefect of one district who, after a prolonged drought, went to the shrine of the local God of Walls and Moats and said to him :

"You and I are jointly responsible for the government of this district. Let us both expose ourselves to the heat of the sun until it either rains, or until the head of whichever of us is responsible for this drought bursts open!"

Ordering the statue of the god carried out into the market place, he stood beside it. Before long the clay head of the statue split open, and immediately thereafter it rained.

Whatever the date of the first frontier wall in China, as distinct from local and city walls, the first great age of wall-building was in the fourth and third centuries B.C., at about the same time that the substitution of cavalry for chariots made warfare more mobile. The six or seven powerful Contending States which then fought for the control of China built walls both against one another and against the outer "barbarians" who were becoming an increasing threat from the north. About 300 B.C. the State of Ch'in built a wall from the T'ao River in Kansu north to the Yellow River, along the oases of the Ninghsia region and then south-east to join the Yellow River again. The State of Chao built a wall from north-east of Ninghsia to a point between Kalgan and Peking. And about 290 B.C. the State of Yen built a wall along its northern frontier, following the northern edge of the Jehol hills.

Geographically these three states of Ch'in, Chao and Yen corresponded roughly to the modern provinces of Shensi, Shansi and Hopei. Theirs were frontier walls, and together they provided the foundation on which Ch'in Shih Huang Ti was to base his one continuous Great Wall. Meanwhile numerous other walls, or Long Ramparts as they were called, were built to protect one state from another. Wei built a wall along the length of its frontier with Ch'in. The southern State of Ch'u built a wall against its northern neighbours. Ch'i built a Long Rampart running from the Yellow River past Mount T'ai to the sea. Probably at that time every major state had some defensive bulwark against other states.

These defences were extended by other means. Chinese farmers in the border lands, where raids or invasions were most likely to come, soon learned to plough their fields with the furrows running from east to west, at right angles to the raiders' line of attack; ploughed fields were a serious handicap to war chariots or carts and could even slow down the nomad cavalry.

Willow trees were also planted in exposed areas to check the advance of cavalry. This was the origin of the "Willow Fence", a sturdy barrier which prolonged the line of the Great Wall in a broad loop into what is now Manchuria, separating Liaotung from Tartary, and traces of which still remain. This Willow Palisade—called the "Pale" by foreigners by analogy with the English Pale in Ireland—was in existence at least as early as the third century B.C., probably earlier, and served to link the Liaotung Peninsula with China rather than the north. Liaotung was more often than not regarded as part of China, administratively linked to the Shantung

Peninsula, for although communication between the two by land lay along the narrow coastal strip of Shanhaikuan and was easily disrupted, communication by sea was very close. The Willow Palisade marked the boundaries of Chinese territory in the extreme north-east, as the Great Wall did along the north.

The line of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's Wall, which is also roughly the present line of the Wall, has been the boundary of China proper for the greater part of her history. But it by no means marks the outer limit of wall-building. Supplementary walls, like high-water marks left by the rising tide, show where the rulers of China expanded outward into the plateau and steppeland of the north. During the fifth and sixth centuries, and again from the tenth to the thirteenth, the whole of north China was ruled by dynasties of northern or "barbarian" origin, empires which straddled the Great Wall and whose frontiers lay far beyond it. Thus there was a tendency to build outer walls. For instance in the twelfth century the Chin, or Golden Tartars, whose empire included modern Manchuria as well as all China north of the Yellow River, built a wall running south-west-north-east as far as the 48th parallel. This, the frontier between the Chin and the Outer Mongolian tribes, was probably the furthest point north reached by any major wall.

The ruins of many lesser walls are still to be seen in Mongolia. In some places old walls have been worn away so smoothly by the centuries that they can be used as roads by the camel caravans and trucks crossing the desert; slightly raised above the surrounding countryside, they are easy to follow at any time of year, and in winter are usually swept clean of snow by the strong winds of the steppe. Owen Lattimore has pointed out that it is hard to imagine some of these outer walls as ever having been planned by Chinese engineers for purposes of defence, or to withstand mounted attack, for they run mile after mile straight across open country and their strong points are often located under the slope of a hill, where they would be most vulnerable. They were more likely built by frontier tribes who were concerned with marking the limits of their territory rather than defending it against invasion by Tartar horsemen who thought in terms of movement and not of holding a fixed line.

Yet, when all is said that can be said about other walls, when allowances are made for fluctuations of the boundary according to the strength or weakness of the ruling dynasty, the line of the Great Wall has for two millenniums marked one of the most absolute frontiers in the world. It has been the dividing line not simply between two countries but between two mutually exclusive ways of life, two regions geographically, climatically and culturally incompatible. It is the symbol of their antagonism.

South of the Wall the country is on the whole well-watered, the great rivers flowing down from the Tibetan highlands being joined by a network of lesser rivers and streams. North of the Wall, except in the north-east where Manchuria is watered by the Liao and the Sungari, or far further north where streams flow into the Amur River or into Siberia, water is always scarce. Such small rivers as there are tend to die away, either flowing into lakes which have no outlet, and may themselves dry up, or seeping away into the dry valleys.

The Chinese cleverly took advantage of this by making sure that as many sources of water as possible were left inside the Great Wall, adding the problem of thirst to the other difficulties of an invading army. But by so doing they also provided the peoples of the northern plateau with a legitimate grievance, and an incentive to force their way through the Wall. The Mongols for instance, who called the great rampart the White Wall, resented being cut off from the only available water for their flocks far more than they resented the Wall as a military barrier.

Rainfall moreover is usually plentiful south of the Wall, and fails towards the north. The south is well suited to agriculture and will support a crowded population; settled communities, prosperous cities, and the arts of civilization developed there from the earliest times. In the north only the borderlands and occasional oases can be cultivated, and even these will not support more than small settlements; the people have remained nomad and pastoral, moving from one grazing area to another on an average of twice a year, their economy based on and their life dependent on their animals. In spite of marginal cultures, and attempts through the centuries to combine the two modes of life, the Great Wall essentially divides the nomad from the farmer. "All north of the Great Wall is the country of the bowmen," was the principle laid down by Han Wén Ti in the second century B.C. "All south of the Great Wall is the country of hats and girdles."

The Wall marks this division historically as well as geographically. With Ch'in Shih Huang Ti and his Great Wall, the history of China begins. One can follow the history of Chinese states, dynasties and kings for centuries before his time with certainty, and trace them back another millennium or two before they fade into myth, but China as an empire, China above all as distinct from the rest of the world, dates from Shih Huang Ti. Until that time the semi-settled Chinese states of the north-west shared many of the characteristics of their neighbouring nomad tribes on the fringes of China, and it might have been difficult to say where one way of life ended and another began. With the building of the Wall a permanent line was drawn between what was, and was not, Chinese.

The Wall is also a linguistic barrier. Whatever common ancestors they may originally have had, the races within and without the Wall have had no common language. Manchu, Mongol and Central Asian Turkish are related to each other, but not to Chinese.

The actual value of the Wall as a protection against the Tartars<sup>1</sup> is debatable. It can be argued that it has never prevented a major invasion. When invasions succeeded it was because the ruling dynasty was weakened and corrupt within, and when a dynasty had thus fallen on evil days there were always commanders ready to sell the northern passes to the enemy. Individual fortresses held out, sometimes for years, and were only captured after fierce fighting, but the Wall as such never had to be taken by storm.

Yet it was a strong deterrent. There is good reason for the little shrines dedicated to the God of War which stand beside so many of the gates of the Wall. Not only did it prevent sporadic raids, but even the great Mongol and Manchu war-lords never dared press on with their conquest of the north China plain until they had secured the Wall behind them. Both Genghis Khan and the Manchu leaders of the seventeenth century had occupied large areas of north China for three or four years in succession, and had had to withdraw again each time, before they could finally gain the Wall and could hold it.

The Great Wall thus played a considerable part in the defence of the realm. Architecturally it is important as being, in its older parts, the earliest structure remaining above ground in China. In spite of the extensive work done by the Mings and in spite of earlier repairs (according to Chinese records it was repaired seven times between the second and seventh centuries A.D.) much of the foundation of the Wall remains that of Shih Huang Ti.

Historically it is fascinating. That line of grey brick leads far back into the troubled past of China, through the rival kingdoms, the supreme emperors, the decay of dynasties and the birth of others; it points far west along that silk road and road of pilgrims which for so long provided the only contact between East and West. And still, in our day, it follows the course of the grey mountains and the yellow plains as it has done for so many centuries, no longer a defence against barbarian invasions but still a symbol of the greatness of China.

<sup>1</sup> Certain terms such as "Tartar" and "Turk" are generally applied to the nomad tribes north and north-west of China even at a time long before Tartars or Turks, strictly speaking, appeared on the scene. The name "Tartar" especially is used in this vague sense by both Chinese and foreign writers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DEMON BARRIER

"The clattering horses blow up the dust with their snorting; twilight settles over the 'Purple Barrier'.

As we wash our swords the blood reddens the stream.

The Great Wall rears up for a thousand miles,

And beyond it the Yin Mountains stand like the northern gates."

*"Military Service"*, by WANG SHIH-YUAN (Ming Dynasty)

Translated by J. F. FORD

THE CHINESE looked upon the Great Wall as the edge of the civilized world. It separated "T'ien Hsia", or "All under Heaven", from the outer darkness. The Romans in their time also attempted to set a definite line, in some places even a wall, between those who could be considered as sharing in the benefits of the Roman Empire, and the barbarians of the trans-Danubian forests, uncouth, belligerent, against whom civilization must be protected. But the Romans probably never felt quite as the Chinese did towards the uncultured tribes who occupied the fringes of their world. The Chinese attitude was one of mingled fear, contempt and an eerie sense that something incomprehensible and inhuman lay outside the confines of their empire.

The life of the northern steppe, the Land of Grass, was completely alien to the Chinese. From very early times, before any wall or any fixed line divided north and south, they spoke of the north as the Demon Regions, a land quite different from their own. Already in the Shang Dynasty one of the emperors is said to have led an expedition into the desert to drive the barbarians back. When Wén Wang publicly denounced the tyrant Chou Hsin, last of the Shang rulers, for his misdeeds he declared that the Emperor's crimes and his cruelty were so flagrant that indignation against him was not confined to the Middle Kingdom but had even spread to the Demon Region. And Confucius praised a minister of the seventh century B.C. for his services against the barbarians, saying that but for him the Chinese might by then be wearing their hair dishevelled and their coats buttoned on the left side instead of the right, in the manner of the wild northern tribes.

Mutual antagonism increased through the centuries. The contrast between the two ways of life was intensified. The Chinese became more settled, more prosperous, more absorbed in the arts and

pleasures of civilization, while the nomads retained their mobility, their disdain for cities, and their superior striking power in war, based on their superb horses and horsemanship. With the building of the Great Wall a line was drawn between the two and the Chinese dread of the outer regions was focussed on a definite barrier.

This may indeed have been one of the reasons, if not for the building of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's wall, at least for its continuing unbroken over peaks where no horse could climb, its existence in places where there could have been no possibility of invasion. It was a barrier not only against the Jung, the Ti, the Hsiung-nu and all their shifting, changing kindred, but also against the devils of the north. For that purpose it was essential that there should be no gap, however small. An unbroken wall would provide a "demon screen" of the same nature as those inner screens which are still built to prevent low-flying devils from entering the palaces, temples and other buildings of China. It shielded the Middle Kingdom from whatever uncanny creatures, visible or invisible, might try to enter in exactly the same way that horseshoe-shaped walls, open to the south, are supposed to protect graveyards from the inimical northern winds.

Symbolically, the Wall was an enormous stone dragon guarding the approaches to China. Shih Huang Ti in later years was greatly attracted by the magic and superstitious practices of Taoism, practices far removed from the original philosophy of Lao Tzu, and in these the dragon bulked large. Dragons could protect a tomb, a city or a country from the pernicious influences of the north; and certainly it needs little imagination to see in this twisting, climbing grey rampart the shape of a dragon.

Because of this feeling that the outer regions were the home of spirits rather than of ordinary human beings, the worst fate that could befall a soldier or an exile was to die there. It was misfortune enough ever to go beyond the Wall, or to be captured by the barbarians, and there is no more poignant subject in Chinese literature than the nostalgic longings of the exile for his homeland; a letter from Li Ling, a brave but unfortunate general who surrendered to the Hsiung-nu in 99 B.C. after the loss of his entire army, is still a classic for Chinese students:

"All day long I see none but barbarians around me. Skins and felt protect me from wind and rain. With mutton and whey I satisfy my hunger and slake my thirst. Companions with whom to while time away, I have none. The whole country is stiff with black ice. I hear naught but the moaning of the bitter autumn blast, beneath which all vegetation has disappeared. I cannot sleep at night. I

turn and listen to the distant sound of Tartar pipes, to the whinnying of Tartar steeds. . . .”

But to die in exile was far worse. It meant that the unfortunate soul, buried abroad, might never again be reborn among its own people but would be doomed to reincarnation after reincarnation in the alien lands. Even in modern times this superstitious dread of the world beyond the Wall persists. The Chinese have been pushing north for generations now, their advance aided by the introduction of railways and improved roads, and the Wall has long since ceased to be an obstacle to the living. Yet the more old-fashioned among them still believe it to be a barrier which the dead cannot cross. Although they may live and trade outside it all their lives, they make provision for their bodies to be brought back and buried in China proper. Sometimes when a coffin is being transported from the Demon Regions for burial at home a live cock will be tethered to it so that the crowing of the cock will enable the soul, which might otherwise lose its way in the wilderness, to follow its body safely inside the Wall.

The Chinese were not alone in their awe of the northern peoples. The western world also believed that the lands north of China were inhabited by devils, or monsters, or else by the ten tribes of Israel who had forsaken the law of Moses and followed after strange gods. The Catalan Map of 1375 shows a region in the extreme north-east of Asia, beyond Cathay, enclosed partly by a range of mountains and partly by the sea, as the land where Gog and Magog were shut up by Alexander the Great, the land whence they “shall come forth with a great multitude in the day of Antichrist”. It was widely believed at that time that the peoples of Gog and Magog were imprisoned somewhere beyond the great Sand Hills or Sea of Sand, north-east of the known world, which no man had ever crossed, and that the barrier which held them there was the Great Wall of China.

The whole queer history of Gog and Magog was confused with the Great Wall. Arab historians called the races of Tartary by the names of Gog and Magog. Christian, Moslem and Jewish legend all described Gog and Magog (or, in Ezekiel, Gog from the land of Magog) as wild barbarian tribes who were destined eventually to break forth and ravage the world. It was not surprising that when the Mongols first surged through the Caspian gates and across Europe they were identified with Gog and Magog as the soldiers of Antichrist.

The Koran gives the most coherent account of who these creatures were. It tells how Dhoulkarnian, or the Two-horned (usually identified with Alexander the Great, who was thus represented on coins),

travelled to different parts of the world and, with divine assistance, drove out idolatry and banished or destroyed the idolaters. At length he came to a place between two mountains, and there the people said to him :

“O Dhoulkarnian! verily Gog and Magog waste this land; shall we then pay thee tribute, so thou build a rampart between us and them?”

“He said: ‘Better than your tribute is the might wherewith my Lord has strengthened me; but help me strenuously, and I will set a barrier between you and them.

“Bring me blocks of iron”—until when it filled the space between the mountain sides—‘Blow,’ said he, ‘upon it’—until when he had set it on fire, he said: ‘Bring me molten brass, that I may pour upon it.’

“And Gog and Magog were not able to scale it, neither were they able to dig through it.

“This,’ said he, ‘is a mercy from my Lord.

“But when the threat of my Lord cometh to pass, He will turn it to dust. . . .”

According to one version Gog and Magog used to try and tunnel their way out under the wall every night, and the sound of their tools could be heard on the other side, but God always repaired the breach before morning. Not until the Last Days will they be allowed to burst forth, and then they will devastate everything that lies in their path as they move swiftly southward, until they too are destroyed at last in the land of Israel. Both in the Bible and in medieval writings it is assumed that the release of Gog and Magog will be one of the signs of the approach of the Day of Judgement.

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” (Revelation, 20.) “Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog. . . . Thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army . . . it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.” (Ezekiel, 38.)

Moslem tradition adds that Gog and Magog are so numerous that when they come they will rise forth from behind every stone and every hill, and that as they march on Israel they will drink up all the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. They will massacre all the inhabitants of earth and will turn their eyes to

Heaven, shooting their arrows against the sky. Then at last God, seeing their work of slaughter done, will destroy them in a single night.

(Compared with these wild hordes, the history of the two famous figures called Gog and Magog which stand outside the Guildhall in London is rather tame. They are supposed to be the last survivors of a race of giants who were descended from the thirty-three wicked daughters of Diocletian. After their brethren had all been slain they were brought to London to act as porters at the royal palace.)

The Wall whereby Alexander the Great imprisoned Gog and Magog was sometimes thought to lie in the Elburz Mountains, or identified with the ruins of ancient fortifications running from the Caspian to the Black Sea. William of Rubruck on his return journey from the court of Mangu Khan in Tartary in 1255 described the foundations of walls which he saw running across the mountains and down to the shore on the west coast of the Caspian as being the remains of the barrier erected by Alexander.

But others believed the barrier to be none other than the Great Wall of China. Ibn Batuta, an Arab traveller who voyaged widely in Africa, the Middle East and the Orient in the years 1325-1355 and who reached south China by sea, was told there that in the far north there were "no other cities, whether of infidels or Mussulmans", and that it was sixty days' journey north to reach the Rampart, the Great Wall of Gog and Magog. Other medieval writers spoke of travellers across Central Asia who had entered Cathay by the Jade Gate in the Wall of Gog and Magog.

The Jade Gate Barrier, or *Yü-mén Kuan*, was in fact the western extremity of the ancient Wall. Chinese records dating back to 104 B.C. speak of it as the last of the fortresses running from Suchou (or Chiu Ch'uan, the "Spring of Wine") north-west along the present borders of Kansu. It was also through the Jade Gate that, according to legend, one of the earliest and certainly the most famous exile from China rode out into the desert and an unknown grave.

Little is known of Lao Tzu's life. He is believed to have been born about 604 B.C., and Ssu-ma Ch'ien, writing some five hundred years later, describes him as a native of the State of Ch'u. He became curator or keeper of the records in the imperial library at Loyang, and there in the capital he is reputed to have had one or more interviews with Confucius in the year 517 B.C., when he would have been about eighty-seven and Confucius about thirty-five. He may have done. More likely the interviews were invented somewhat later by the Taoists to prove that their revered founder was more than a match for the founder of Confucianism. Confucius, it is said, was completely overcome by the wisdom of his elder. He commented

afterwards that although he knew how birds could fly, how fishes swam, and the ways of all the other animals, he could not understand the flight of the dragon—and Lao Tzu was a dragon.

Lao Tzu's philosophy was mainly one of inaction—"Do nothing, and all things will be done!"—and of returning good for evil. It was in sharp contrast to the Confucian ideal of building the perfect state in this world. Yet Lao Tzu had this in common with Confucius; both despaired of ever converting the men of their time to their doctrines. Lao Tzu pursued his studies in Loyang for a long time, some say until he was a hundred and sixty or even two hundred years old. But at last he was so disheartened by the decadence of the Chou Dynasty and the endless feuds of the contending States that he determined to withdraw from the world.

Leaving the capital, he made his way to the pass at Han-ku, in north-west Honan, which separated the imperial domain of Chou from the western States. The Warden of Han-ku, already a Taoist, welcomed him reverently and brought him tea, an act of courtesy said to have been the origin of the Chinese custom of receiving every guest with a cup of tea. He also did his best to dissuade the Master from leaving the Middle Kingdom, and when Lao Tzu remained unmoved begged him at least to set down his thoughts and his philosophy for the guidance of others before continuing his journey. To this Lao Tzu agreed. There and then he composed a work in two volumes, of over five thousand characters, in which he attempted to define the indefinable "Tao" and to teach those who followed him the means of achieving it.

This done, he would stay no longer. Riding on a black buffalo, he travelled west again until at last he reached the Jade Gate, and there left the world behind him and disappeared forever into the wilderness beyond; "nor is it known where he died," is Ssu-ma Ch'ien's comment.

Details vary. Some say that the Warden of Han-ku, having entrusted Lao Tzu's writings to a disciple, followed him beyond the Wall. One Chinese writer makes Lao Tzu live five hundred years or so earlier, and describes him as having travelled widely in the Western Region and converted many of the kingdoms there to Taoism before he finally renounced the world. According to this version it was in the year 1039 B.C. that he mounted his chariot, drawn by buffaloes, for the last time and rode into exile.

The book reputedly written by Lao Tzu at the frontier pass of Chou was the *Tao Te Ching*, the sacred canon of Taoism. Authorities still disagree as to whether or not it is genuine. Those who believe it to be a forgery, probably dating from the early Han Dynasty, claim that Lao Tzu himself declared in relation to Tao—

"Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know"—and quote the poem by Po Chu-I:

"Who know, speak not; who speak, know naught'  
Are words from Lao Tzu's lore.  
What then becomes of Lao Tzu's own  
Five thousand words and more?"

There is some doubt about the site of the original Jade Gate. It may have been where the town which bears its name, Yümen, still stands. It may have been even further west. Or it may have been the present Chiayükuān. But whichever is the Jade Gate of the early records, it is undoubtedly Chiayükuān which has inherited the role of that famous outpost. It is at Chiayükuān that the Wall ends, and has ended for the greater part of its long history. It is there that, in the eyes of the ancient Chinese, the world ended.

Chiayükuān is strategically located at a point between rising hills. The city itself is still, or was until recently, an important military centre, with barracks built to accommodate a large garrison, and its walls are reinforced by towers, formidable gates and outer barbicans.

The name Chiayükuān means the Pass of the Pleasant, or Auspicious Valley, and indeed the area between Suchou and the Pass is a pleasant one, watered by springs and rivulets, a green country of meadows and fields. This can only have made the contrast greater. For beyond the Wall, beyond this final fortress of Chiayükuān, lies the dreaded land known to the Chinese as Kou Wai, or "Outside the Mouth", the land that is in every sense "outside". Beyond lie the mountains of Tibet, and worse than that, the Black Gobi, the great empty waste of grey sand and black pebbles, where the winds howl and demons haunt the ruins of old cities or lie in wait for the lone traveller. Desolation and desert stretch as far as the eye can see. The Buddhist pilgrim, Fa Hsien, in the fifth century A.D. described the region beyond the Wall as one where neither bird nor beast could live, where evil spirits lay in wait to swallow up the unwary traveller in a whirlwind of sand, and where one could only guide oneself by the whitened bones of those who had gone before.

Throughout the centuries travellers were unanimous in believing the desert to be occupied by demons. Even in daylight their voices could be heard whispering; drums and the clash of weapons sounded in the distance. And at night anyone who lagged behind his caravan would be led astray by what seemed to be the voices of his comrades, by the tramp of their horses, or a flickering light now and then, and would find himself at daybreak completely lost and alone. Many such

hallucinations may have been caused by mirages, and others by the imaginings of frightened and exhausted men. But when the winds there blow from a certain direction the shifting sands of the desert do have their own eerie sound, a sound sometimes as of music, of drums and even human voices.

Empty and haunted although these outer regions were supposed to be, they were made more terrifying by the tradition that cities had once flourished there and had been destroyed. Early western travellers speak of passing extensive ruins in the desert, and it seems possible that areas which in recent centuries have been deserted and seemingly uninhabitable were once the site of walled cities. Especially near Tun Huang, modern explorers have had the impression that a formerly settled and populous district there must have been overtaken by some cataclysm and buried under the sands. Some were even convinced that this was the original Eden of the human race.

Now, within the last few years, these wastelands are being brought to life again. Railroads, factories, industries and above all aeroplanes are changing the wildernesses of Central Asia into a habitable if perhaps not yet hospitable land, and many a tourist from the West has now touched down by air at oases which earlier travellers struggled across the terrifying deserts to reach. Something of desolation and emptiness undoubtedly still lingers "Outside the Mouth", but it is no longer the land of demons and phantom caravans.

Chiayükuān is the last fortress, and its gate towers are a landmark to anyone seeking the end of the Great Wall, but the Wall itself extends another five miles beyond the city to the south, stopping short at last on a cliff near the Tibetan border where it overlooks the Great White River. There, a mile above sea level, the long, long rampart, the great bulwark which has followed a circuitous and apparently haphazard course across the whole width of China, which rises so precipitously out of the sea fifteen hundred miles to the east comes to an equally precipitous stop.

A hundred yards outside the gate of Chiayükuān is a stone tablet bearing the words, "Earth's Greatest Barrier". Below this is an inscription explaining that this represents the ancient boundary between the Flowery Kingdom and the barbarians, which no one was allowed to cross from either one side or the other without permission. The meaning of these few words, the bitter, melancholy, sometimes hopeful feelings of those who did pass the barrier, the sudden step from one world to another, are even more poignantly expressed by innumerable poems and brief messages of farewell written on the Wall itself.

It was here, through the centuries, that all those who travelled

westward took leave of their native land. It was here that the voluntary or involuntary exiles, the criminals, the disgraced officials, the outlaws, looked nostalgically back towards their homes for the last time. Here, too, the pilgrims, setting their faces towards India to find a new religion, the soldiers riding west to campaign in Central Asia, the merchants carrying silk on the first step of its long journey to Rome, must have turned back for a last glimpse and wondered whether they would return. For every sorrowing poem, for every inscription, there must have been many others who shared the thoughts of the poet.

“When I leave thy gates, O Chiayükuan,  
My tears will never cease to run. . . .”

There is a local superstition that whoever passes through the gate of Chiayükuan should throw a pebble against the outer side of the Wall. If the traveller is destined to return safely to China the pebble will rebound towards him; if not it drops straight down to the heap of stones below where other unfortunate throwers have tried their luck and lost. Much of the surface of the Wall there is pockmarked and worn away by the number of stones hopefully and apprehensively thrown against it by the outward-bound travellers.

### CHAPTER THREE

## WATCH-TOWERS, AND THE RUIN OF CHOU

THE LONG grey line of the Great Wall is accented by a series of towers built into the fabric of the Wall at short intervals, and providing its main fortification. These towers or bastions were the strongholds that actually defended the Wall. They were the sentry-posts and the headquarters for troops stationed along the frontier. Theoretically at least, they were placed not more than two bows-shots from each other, so that no single foot of the main wall would be outside the range of archers sheltering within the towers; they were also usually so constructed as to project a few feet on the outer side of the Wall, making it possible for the defenders to cover the base of the Wall on either side.

The dimensions of the towers vary, but they average about forty feet in height and forty feet square at the base, sloping in to about thirty feet square at the top. And it is estimated that at the height of its usefulness the Wall must have included at least twenty-five thousand such towers.

In addition to the defence towers thus forming an integral part of the Wall there are also innumerable watch-towers, similar in size and in construction, but free-standing and often located far outside the Wall. Such separate watch-towers undoubtedly existed long before the time of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti and possibly even before the building of the first frontier or tribal walls. Some parts of the different state walls linked up by Shih Huang Ti may have consisted of strongly fortified towers close enough together to fend off invasion, rather than a continuous rampart.

The outer watch-towers served both for observation and for defence. In Ming times at least they were expected to hold out independently if attacked, and were provisioned with food, water and weapons to withstand a siege of four months. At that time there were probably as many as fifteen thousand separate towers, concentrated for the most part on prominent hill-tops, at the mouths of valleys, or at the passes through which invaders were most likely to come. Defenders in these lonely outposts facing the lands of the barbarians could each overlook a wide area; taken together they must have covered almost the whole of the northern frontier. The important trade routes to the north moreover were not only guarded by many towers such as these, but were fortified by redoubtable

strongholds such as Shanhaukuan by the sea; Kupeikou, where the main road leads to Jehol; Nankou and Yen-mén Kuan (or Gate of the Wild Geese, so-called because geese flying north were believed to pass that way) which lie north and west of Peking; and Chiayükuan in the far west.

Even now, when long stretches of the Wall are ruined and others falling slowly into decay, and the outer towers neglected and forgotten, some twenty thousand defence and watch-towers are believed to be still standing. Nor will anyone who has seen the Wall where it crosses the mountains north of Peking be inclined to question such an estimate, for there the towers seem to stand on every peak and you must strain your eyes to guess whether the rough silhouette of some distant summit is that of rock or of watch-tower. From one point above Nankou alone twenty-eight towers are visible, some surmounting heights so lofty that it is not hard to believe in the story of the Chinese philosopher who climbed up to the moon from the highest of these.

Both the outer watch-towers and the towers of the Wall were used for signalling. Smoke or flags could be used by day, fires by night. Messages were sent even from the furthest fortress at Chiayükuan to the capital within a few hours, and an answer returned with equal speed. Any unusual occurrence, such as the migration of a nomad tribe or the approach of strangers, could be reported without delay; reinforcements could be summoned immediately to any part of the frontier. Some such system of signalling from tower to tower the length and breadth of the country must have existed from very early times, certainly many centuries before Ch'in Shih Huang Ti in the third century B.C. conceived the idea of a single Great Wall.

These signals in fact played a considerable part in the disaster that sealed the fate of the Chou Dynasty in 771 B.C., the crucial year in which the Chou Emperor was forced by the pressure of the barbarians to move his capital eastward to Loyang. This defeat, from which Chou never recovered, and which laid the foundations for the rise of the Ch'in Dynasty and Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, came about in a strange way.

The Chou Dynasty had already occupied the throne for over three hundred years when, during the reign of the Emperor Hsüan from 827-782 B.C., a divinely inspired child was heard to cry out over and over again: "Bows of mulberry wood and quivers of wicker will be the ruin of the Chou Dynasty." This cryptic announcement caused great alarm, and when the Emperor discovered that one old man and his wife were renowned for making mulberry bows and wicker quivers he ordered them executed. Warned in time, however, the couple escaped and fled towards the west.

Scarcely had they left the capital when the two refugees heard the wailing of a child, and discovered a little girl abandoned by the roadside. Moved by sympathy towards a fellow sufferer, they picked her up and carried her with them on their long journey to Pao, a remote principality in the far north-west corner of China.

By the time the child grew up her foster-parents were both dead and it is unlikely that anyone associated her with a half-forgotten prophecy about mulberry bows. The Emperor Hsüan was dead, and his son Yu had succeeded. Meanwhile the people of Pao had inadvertently offended the new Emperor, and they conceived the idea of averting his wrath by presenting him with a beautiful concubine for the Inner Courts of the palace. Their choice fell upon the young girl who had been brought to Pao by the refugees, who was now of an age to be married, and who was of exceeding beauty. She was accordingly received into the imperial harem in 779 B.C., and there became known as Ssu of Pao, or Pao Ssu.

Yu Wang was immediately and completely captivated by her. He soon found an excuse for degrading the Empress and her son, the Heir Apparent, who thereupon took refuge with his mother's family in one of the north-western states. Pao Ssu was proclaimed Empress, and Pao Ssu's first son was named Heir to the throne. All this scandalized the court, and incidentally simplified the work of modern historians. For one of the odes deplored the conduct of the Emperor Yu points out that even the heavenly bodies are disturbed :

"The sun and the moon announce evil,  
Not keeping to their proper paths . . ."

and goes on to mention a solar eclipse on a day that would be August 29th, 776 B.C. in the western calendar. An eclipse did occur on August 29th, 776 B.C., and the frivolous, dissolute Yu Wang, having thus provided the first irrefutable date in Chinese history, is far better remembered than many more virtuous rulers.

But to return to Pao Ssu. Although of a lascivious and pleasure-loving disposition, she seldom smiled, much less laughed. And yet her smile was as radiantly beautiful as it was rare. The distracted Emperor constantly sought new ways of amusing her, new entertainments, jugglers, clowns, dwarfs and dancers, theatrical displays and boating excursions on the lake, but as time passed she wearied of them all. She wearied even of what had long been her favourite pastime. For many months she had delighted in listening to the Emperor while he ripped rare and costly varieties of silk into shreds, deriving a curious pleasure from the slightly different sounds produced by the different materials as they were torn; now even that

failed to amuse her. Yu Wang became ever more reckless in his attempts to bring a smile to her lips. At last he offered a thousand pounds of gold to anyone who could make her laugh.

Then the Chief Minister made a suggestion. Why not light beacon fires in the chain of watch-towers which protected the Middle Kingdom? A system whereby flames lit on the towers of the capital would be repeated from one tower to another over hundreds of miles had been devised long before to spread the alarm in case of a surprise attack on the capital by the barbarians; the various semi-independent vassals on whose support the Chou Dynasty depended could thus be quickly summoned to its aid. The minister pointed out that if these signals were to be lighted some evening when there was no question of an enemy attack, the response might amuse even the grave-faced Pao Ssu.

The entertainment proved a great success. The sight of the vassal lords arriving in haste with their troops and their retinues, armed and ready for battle, and their subsequent discomfiture when they realized that the alarm had been only a practical joke, so amused Pao Ssu that she laughed outright.

Meanwhile the rightful Heir to the throne, determined to win back his heritage, had entered into an alliance with the Jung, a western barbarian tribe of the time who were probably only too ready to take advantage of any opportunity to attack their neighbours. The allies marched upon the capital and as soon as Yu Wang heard news of their approach he ordered the beacons lit, signalling from tower to tower and hill-top to hill-top to rally the neighbouring princes. There was no response. The vassals had no intention of answering another false alarm to amuse the languid Pao Ssu.

Alone and outnumbered, Yu Wang faced a combined barbarian and Chinese army led by his own son, and was utterly defeated in a battle which took place south of the Wei River, at the foot of Mount Li. He himself was killed, Pao Ssu either killed or taken prisoner, and their capital was sacked by the barbarians. The exiled Heir Apparent thereupon ascended the throne of his fathers as Emperor P'ing, but the power of the Chou Dynasty was permanently broken and the new Emperor soon discovered (in the words used by Wu San-kuei over two thousand years later) that he had "brought in lions to help rid himself of dogs". The Jung, having won the victory, intended to make the most of it. It was not until Ch'in and other of the vassal states came to his assistance that P'ing finally "persuaded" his barbarian allies to retire to their own lands, and even then he was so afraid that they might overrun Chou again that he insisted on transferring his capital further east along the Yellow River to what he considered a safer location.

The ruler of Ch'in, Warden of the Western Marches, covered the retreat of the Chou court eastward. The Emperor P'ing, partly in gratitude for this timely support, and partly on the understanding that Ch'in would continue to act as a buffer against the barbarians, therefore bestowed the greater part of the original Chou estates on the Prince of Ch'in. Ch'in came into possession of the fertile, well-sheltered valley of the Wei River, as well as the strategic area where the Wei joins the great Yellow River, the very heart of ancient China. It was this, perhaps more than anything else, which made possible the triumphs of Ch'in during the next few centuries.

## CHAPTER FOUR

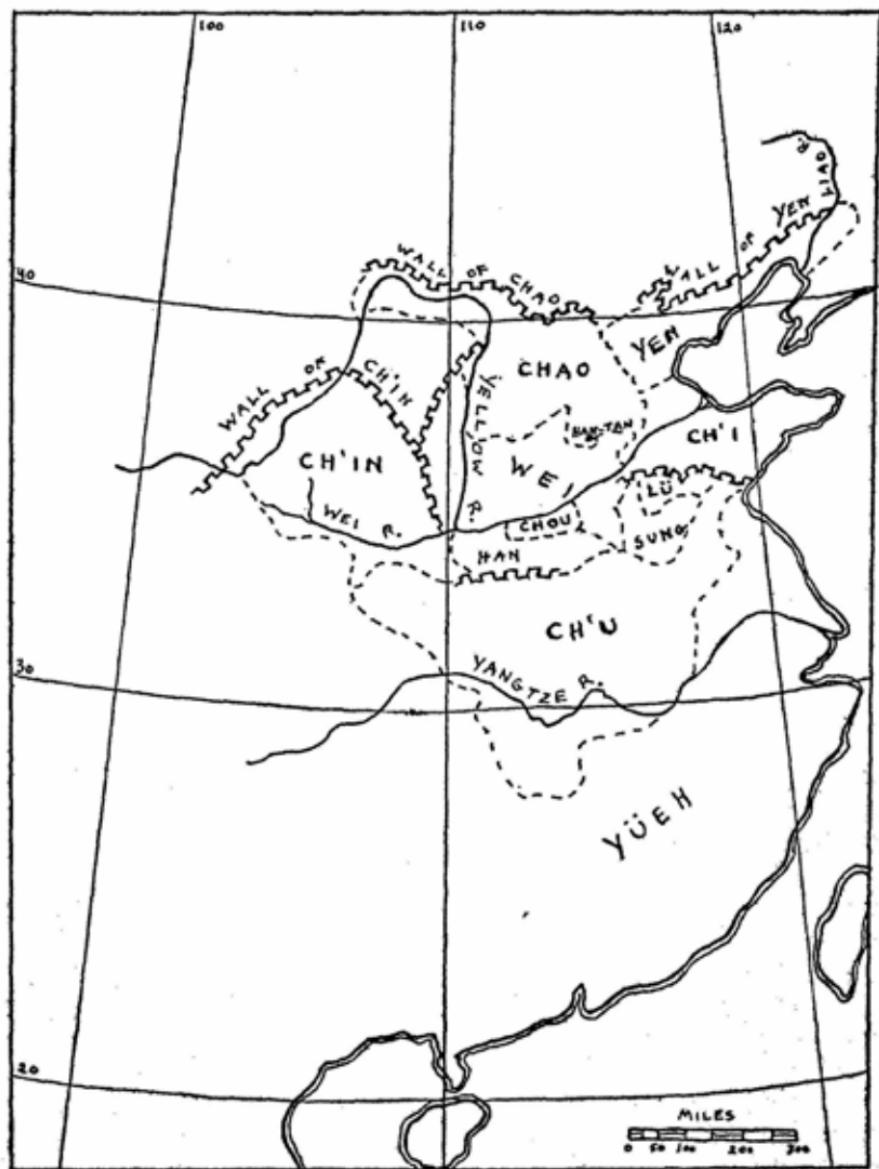
### THE RISE OF CH'IN

CH'IN SHIH HUANG Ti created China, both the nation and the name by which it is known to us. Other origins for "China" have been suggested but the most likely derivation is from Ch'in, for Chinese histories tell of ships of the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti sailing as far west as Bengal, and these must have made the name of the ruling dynasty familiar to the Indians at that time, and presumably through them to the Persians, Egyptians, and other western peoples. It is appropriate that the name of Ch'in should be thus remembered. For although there had been earlier dynasties, and the idea of a single, divinely appointed Emperor who enjoyed the Mandate of Heaven was centuries old, these had ruled a feudal society, struggling to maintain control over semi-independent princes and noblemen. It was only with the coming of the short-lived Ch'in Dynasty that China became a nation.

Nor was the feudal system ever restored in the same form after Ch'in. Despite long periods of anarchy and division, and of separate kingdoms warring against each other, the idea of a central government and of one supreme power never altogether died out in China. Sceptics might comment that centralization only meant that the people were preyed on by one lion instead of a gang of jackals, and it would be wrong to imagine that there was any sudden change in the condition of the peasantry or the majority of the people themselves. Chinese Communist theory indeed insists that China remained a feudal state until modern times, and dismisses Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's form of government as "centralized feudalism".

Yet there can be little doubt that Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's achievement was a remarkable one, and that he was to a great extent responsible for the vision of China as a united empire. It was this vision which was symbolized by the building of the Great Wall.

Neither the Wall nor the united empire which it enclosed for the first time within a definite boundary were the work of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti alone. The extraordinary burst of activity which characterized his reign was based on the equally extraordinary rise to power of the State of Ch'in during the preceding century, and this in turn was based on the work of a handful of brilliant and unscrupulous men who were determined to put their own ideas of government into practice, and did so at all costs.



PRINCIPAL CONTENDING STATES AND THEIR WALLS,  
FOURTH AND THIRD CENTURIES B.C.

After the fall of Yu Wang in 771 B.C. and the transfer of the capital under his successor the Chou Dynasty ceased to exert any effective control over the country. The imperial domain of Chou—known then as the “Middle Kingdom”, a name later applied to all China—had become one of the smallest of the dozen or so feudal states into which China was divided, and although the other states still formally did homage to the Chou Emperor and pretended to be his vassals he held no power beyond that of his name. The Contending States, as they were called, were the real rulers of the country and it was their rivalry which maintained an uneasy balance of power. Sometimes they were allied with each other in different combinations, sometimes all against all, the strongest among them expanding wherever they could both at each other's expense and the expense of the more primitive people north and south of China itself.

Ch'in, in the north-west corner of the country, was originally one of the smaller kingdoms. Strategically, however, it was an important buffer between China and the outer nomad tribes. It was largely the armies of Ch'in which kept the “barbarians” from overrunning the inner states and the Middle Kingdom.

Yet one should not think of any fixed line between the Chinese and the “barbarians” as already existing at that time. Not only did the border between them fluctuate but the border states, Ch'in in particular, shared to some extent the character of both peoples. It was through the Ch'ins that such barbarian innovations as the use of cavalry instead of war-chariots were introduced into China, and the Ch'in forces undoubtedly owed much of their strength and mobility to their adoption of barbarian customs and modes of warfare. Indeed until at least the fourth century B.C. the inner and more civilized Chinese states despised the people of Ch'in for their rude manners, influenced as these were by the nomads, and treated them as scarcely different from the Jung, the Ti and other barbarians.

The kings of Ch'in none the less claimed to be descended from one of the early mythical rulers of China, said to have ascended the throne in 2513 B.C. Inevitably, their origin was miraculous; the grand-daughter of the Emperor swallowed an egg dropped by a supernatural, dark-winged bird and thereafter gave birth to the legendary hero who founded the family. During the Chou Dynasty they were appointed lords of an area along the upper Wei River, where they were for some time charged with the care of the imperial horses, and where their victories over the Jung tribes earned them the title of Defenders of the Western Marches. We have seen how in 771 B.C. they inherited a large slice of Chou territory. Thereafter their rise to power was rapid, and in great measure due to the series

of remarkable advisers who came to seek their fortunes at the court of Ch'in.

It was a time for adventurers. An ambitious and able man who felt that his talents were being wasted in his native state thought nothing of transferring them to another. Young noblemen became political soldiers of fortune, taking their knowledge, their ability, and often inside information about the internal affairs of other states to whatever ruler seemed likely to make the most of them.

One such talented wanderer, Fan Li, became the classic example of a man unable to avoid success. As Minister of Yueh, his advice enabled the King of Yueh to annex once and for all the rival state of Wu. But no sooner was the victory won than he fled to the State of Ch'i, commenting: "When the bird is killed, one puts aside the bow; when the hare is taken, one eats the dog; when the enemy is vanquished one undoes the Minister to whom one owes the victory." In Ch'i, under a pseudonym, he became Chief Minister and accumulated a fortune. Still afraid of tempting fate, he then resigned, gave away his money, and wandered south into yet another state. Settling down under a third name and intending to live out his days in obscurity, he experimented with rearing fish in ponds, but this proved to be such a success that he involuntarily acquired a third fortune.

Confucius himself, disillusioned by the frivolous attitude of its ruler, left his native state of Lu and wandered for thirteen years from one state to another, always hoping to find a ruler who would put his precepts for the perfect society into practice.

But Confucius was offering an ideal. Enormous although his influence was to be on later generations, far greater immediate results were achieved by the hard-headed ministers who, whichever state they might have been born in, now found scope for their talents in Ch'in; in particular by one Kung-sun Yang, a man who would have been remarkable anywhere at any time.

Kung-sun Yang was a native of Wei, descended through a concubine from the ruling family of Wei, and for a time he was employed at court there as assistant to the Chancellor, Kung-shu Tso. The latter was much impressed by his ability. But before he had had time to become well known in the councils of Wei the Chancellor fell ill, and it seemed unlikely that he would recover. The ruler of Wei, Marquis Hui, on hearing of this came to call on him and offer his sympathy, and in the course of conversation he tactfully inquired who the Minister would consider best qualified to succeed him in the event that he were so unfortunate as to succumb to his malady.

"Undoubtedly Kung-sun Yang," replied the Chancellor.

"Although he is young, he is extraordinarily talented and you could not do better than to follow his advice in everything."

The Marquis remained silent. It must have been clear to Kung-shu Tso that he did not intend to follow his advice. "On the other hand," he added, "If you decide not to make Kung-sun Yang your Minister, put him to death. He is not a man to be satisfied with anything less than the highest position, and it would be fatal if his talents were to be at the service of another state."

When his royal visitor had left, still apparently unconvinced, Kung-shu Tso immediately summoned Kung-sun Yang. "My first duty was to my master, who is also first in my affections," he told him. "But you hold second place in my heart. I have advised him as best I can, and now I must advise you. I warn you, fly at once, now, while I am still alive!"

Unlike the Marquis, Kung-sun Yang profited by his advice and wasted no time in crossing into the neighbouring State of Ch'in. There Duke Hsiao, an enterprising ruler who was always trying to attract new talent from outside Ch'in, immediately accepted his services.

This was about the year 360 B.C. In the next ten years Kung-sun Yang—or, as he soon became, Lord Shang—transformed the State of Ch'in. What had been a feudal society, a group of nobles governing their own territories in their own way, became a highly centralized kingdom under one government and one law. Inevitably there was opposition. Official reaction to any new idea, then as throughout the greater part of Chinese history, was that if it had not been done in the time of Yao and Shun, or at least during the Shang and Chou Dynasties, it either could not or should not be done at any time. But Kung-sun Yang persisted.

"Wise men must make new laws in the present, as did the wise men of the past," he told his colleagues. "It is not only the privilege but the duty of the superior man to modify the customs of his predecessors. Those without special genius or talent should cling to routine, confining themselves to seeing that the laws are observed, but those who have the ability to do so should constantly introduce new laws."

Nothing and no one was spared by Kung-sun Yang in his determination to break with tradition. The state was deliberately divided into districts which would cut across the old feudal boundaries. The old system by which farmland had been divided into squares, and each square in turn into nine fields which were to be cultivated by eight families, the produce of the ninth field being the government's share, was abrogated in favour of individual ownership and direct taxation. The privileges and prerogatives of the hereditary arist-

cracy were sharply curtailed, and a new aristocracy established of officials who had distinguished themselves in war or rendered other services to the state.

The population of the state was sub-divided into groups of five and ten families, mutually responsible; responsible for helping each other in case of need, and responsible for denouncing each other's crimes and misdemeanours. If the members of a group failed to report on one of their number who had infringed the law, they were all subject to the same penalty as the criminal. And under this system the people of Ch'in rapidly became so law-abiding that it was said that a jewel left lying in the street would lie there forever; no one would pick it up.

Many of the measures introduced by Kung-sun Yang, and later by Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, can scarcely fail to call to mind measures introduced by the present Chinese Peoples' Republic. Mutual responsibility, denunciation, the abolition or near-abolition of bribery and corruption, the cold, humourless efficiency with which theoretically perfect laws are enforced on a society inevitably subject to human imperfections, have been known in China long before a Communist government came into power.

The stringent laws against corruption and extravagance were ruthlessly enforced even at court. When the Heir Apparent, who perhaps not unnaturally considered himself to be above any such regulations, openly and continually ignored the new laws Kung-sun Yang felt that he could not punish the son of his master but he did not hesitate to apply the law of collective responsibility. He therefore executed the prince's chief tutor and branded his assistant tutor. This drastic remedy, which in the long run sealed Kung-sun Yang's own fate, finally convinced the court as well as the common people that the law meant exactly what it said.

Military discipline was no less severe. A large, strong and well-trained army, with wide experience gained fighting the barbarians, was maintained. Results were also achieved by terror, for Ch'in now adopted the barbarian habit of paying a fixed price for enemy heads and their records speak of premiums being paid for sixty thousand or eighty thousand heads on the morning after a major battle. The numbers are doubtless exaggerated; problems of transport and feeding alone would make it unlikely that so many men were engaged in any one battle at that time. But the principle was undoubtedly effective. The other states were increasingly disconcerted and horrified to find what a ruthless antagonist they now faced in Ch'in.

Meanwhile immigration was encouraged on every level. Ch'in became the natural goal not only of the talented adventurer, the

ambitious soldier, but of farmers, labourers and artisans. This policy of using "foreigners" contributed much to the greatness of Ch'in, and it was a policy persisted in against all opposition for the next hundred years and more. As late as 237 B.C., when native Ch'in ministers were demanding the expulsion of all foreigners, the then Chief Minister Li Ssu, himself a foreigner, eloquently defended the system by recounting the great services of men such as Kung-sun Yang, and ended with a plea not to sacrifice the greatness of the state by refusing to make use of all men of talent, whatever their origin.

Pointing out that the expansion of Ch'in was in great measure the work of foreign advisers, he went on to describe the beauty and the value of many things which were not native to Ch'in, the charm of foreign music, the beauty of foreign women, the jade, the pearls, the foreign silks which they enjoyed, the ceremonial drums, the fine swords and the swift horses which the ruler of Ch'in himself rode.

"The T'ai Shan is a great mountain," he added. "Because it uses every grain of sand that will increase its height, nor does it even reject the dust that falls upon it. The Huang Ho is a great river and the sea a great body of water because they accept every rivulet, however tiny, which flows into them and adds a drop to their greatness."

Some of the measures credited to Kung-sun Yang may have been introduced by earlier or by later ministers, but he was undoubtedly the moving spirit in the policies which led to Ch'in's supremacy. Under his administration Ch'in possessed a model government, incorruptible officials, a silent and biddable people, and a powerful army.

It was on his advice that Duke Hsiao moved the capital of Ch'in east along the river to Hsien-yang, a more central location and one which had been the site of the Chou Dynasty capital until the débâcle of 771 B.C. This particular location on the Wei, just west of the elbow of the Yellow River, seems to have been the one chosen by almost all the dynasties of ancient China for their capital. A new, strong dynasty inevitably gravitated there, even as a weakened dynasty seemed inevitably to move further east.

"The country of Ch'in combines all advantages," was the argument used some years later when advisers to the first Emperor of the Han Dynasty, which succeeded that of Ch'in, insisted that he build his capital there and nowhere else. "The mountains surrounding it render access difficult, the Huang Ho is a natural moat protecting it, and the gorges and defiles through which one must approach it are natural fortresses where a handful of men can halt an army."

Duke Hsiao died in 338 B.C. and was succeeded by that same Heir

Apparent whose tutors had been so harshly dealt with by Kung-sun Yang when their pupil refused to obey the new laws. His feelings towards the great statesman were thus anything but friendly, and he immediately accused Kung-sun Yang of intending to rebel. Kung-sun Yang succeeded in escaping from the capital, intending to take shelter in some out of the way town, but he was defeated by the stringency of his ordinances.

"You know, Prince," the innkeeper told him in the first village where he tried to spend the night, "that according to your regulations whoever receives a man in his house without a magistrate's passport is liable to the same penalty due to the one he lodges. You cannot show me a passport, and you are accused of rebellion. How can I receive you here?"

"Alas," said Kung-sun Yang, "that I should see the wisdom of my own views turned against me."

Unable to remain in Ch'in, he crossed into Wei. Having, however, not only abandoned his native state, but later defeated the armies of Wei by guile and treachery, he was not popular there and the people of Wei drove him back into Ch'in. He made a last stand on his own estates but he was eventually overpowered, killed, and his body drawn asunder by five horses. His entire family was exterminated.

Yet in spite of his severity the people of Ch'in wept for him, recalling his own austere habits and the standard of virtue on which he had insisted. And the changes he had made endured, many of them being carried out on a nation-wide scale when the Ch'in Dynasty came to the throne a century later.

The struggle between the Contending States was now reaching a climax. As Ch'in grew more powerful coalitions were formed against her. Again and again the other states swore to stand together, which was their only hope, but each time intrigues, internal jealousies and skilful diplomacy on the part of Ch'in successfully undermined their alliances, and one by one Ch'in crushed or absorbed the weaker states.

In 255 B.C., Chao, the then King of Ch'in and great-grandfather of the future Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, overthrew the last Emperor of the Chou Dynasty, a shadowy figure still clinging to the pretence of imperial power, and occupied the Chou capital. This success gave him an overwhelming advantage in his claim to have received the Mandate of Heaven and, although it was to be another thirty four years before Ch'in's conquest of China was complete, the Ch'in Dynasty is often said to date from that year.

In capturing the Chou capital Chao is also supposed to have captured the Nine Tripods of Yü. These talismans were reputedly cast

by the great Emperor Yü in 2202 B.C. from copper which had been sent as tribute by the nine provinces, and each was engraved with a detailed map of one of the provinces, being further embellished with drawings of all the strange spirits and demons who were believed to occupy the outer regions not yet explored by man. They had been in the possession of every Emperor since Yü, and had become in a sense the Emperor's title to the throne. In 403 B.C. they had suddenly reverberated or trembled of their own accord, and it was generally believed that they thus gave warning of the impending downfall of Chou.

Yet although Chao is said to have taken possession of these Tripods in 255 B.C., some thirty-five years later Ch'in Shih Huang Ti was attempting to dredge one of the tributaries of the Huai River in search of the same Tripods. They were not found, nor have they ever been seen since. The more likely story, therefore, is that an earlier Chou Emperor ordered them thrown into the river some time during the fourth century B.C. as the only way to keep them from falling into the hands of the Ch'in, and thus seeming to confer the authority of Heaven upon these upstarts.

Other remarkable statesmen, most if not all of them "foreigners", followed in the footsteps of Kung-sun Yang. One of these, Lü Pu-wei, played a very curious part in the history of Ch'in. He was certainly responsible for bringing Shih Huang Ti to the throne, and was known as his "second father", but the story, echoed by both Chinese and foreign writers through the centuries, that he was in fact Shih Huang Ti's real father was probably a slander designed to make out that the great Ch'in ruler was illegitimate.

During the reign of Chao, King of Ch'in, a grandson of his named I Jen, one of the twenty or more sons of the Heir Apparent, was sent as a hostage to Han-tan, capital of the State of Chao. There, Ch'in and Chao not being on good terms with each other, he was treated with scant courtesy and lived in poor circumstances. And there he made the acquaintance of Lü Pu-wei, a travelling merchant and a man of unlimited energy and ambition. After their first meeting Lü Pu-wei reputedly went home to his father and said :

"Tell me, what profit can one gain from cultivating the fields?"

"Ten per cent."

"And from trading in pearls and jade?"

"A hundred."

"And what profit is to be gained from setting up the ruler of a state?"

"Ah, that is beyond all reckoning."

"Well then," said Lü Pu-wei, "I have found merchandise worth setting store by!"

Next he went to call on the young prince.

"I come as one who is able to enlarge your gate," he told him, a phrase meaning to improve his circumstances.

"Better enlarge your own gate, sir," said I Jên ruefully, "and then enlarge mine."

"That cannot be. My gate depends upon your gate for enlargement."

Thereafter Lü Pu-wei devoted all his talents to furthering the interests of I Jên. He was determined that the latter should inherit the throne of Ch'in, and with that object in mind he now paid a visit to the capital of Ch'in. There he succeeded in persuading the wife of the Heir Apparent, who was childless, that if her husband were to die her position would be extremely precarious unless she had already adopted as her own child one of her husband's sons by a concubine. He, of course, recommended I Jên. He also brought presents from I Jên, assuring her that the exiled prince was extremely devoted not only to his father but to herself, and stressing his unhappiness at being away from court. Eventually both the Heir Apparent and his wife, a devoted couple in spite of the numerous progeny he appears to have had by his concubines, agreed to this project and to the formal adoption of I Jên. I Jên was brought back to the capital as heir to the Heir Apparent.

Meanwhile in Han-tan he had fallen in love with Lü Pu-wei's wife, a girl of great beauty, and Lü Pu-wei surrendered her to his friend and master with apparent willingness. It was the son, Chêng, whom she bore to I Jên in November of the year 260 B.C. who was to become Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. And it was this circumstance which enabled the enemies of Shih Huang Ti—and they were legion, including practically all scholars, historians and Confucians—to claim that Lü Pu-wei was actually his father and to refer to him pointedly as Lü Chêng, emphasizing his supposed bastard origin.

Certainly the slander, if slander it was, served its purpose. It has been assumed to be true ever since. Yet even in accounts which tell how Lü Pu-wei bought the girl especially so that after he had married her I Jên should see and desire her, thus enabling a son of Lü Pu-wei's own to ascend the throne of Ch'in, it is said that she gave birth to the heir a "great period" after marrying I Jên, and a "great period" is usually taken to mean at least a year.

Lü Pu-wei in any case had not long to wait before his protégé became king. Chao died in 251 B.C. and his successor, I Jên's father, died within the year. I Jên himself therefore came to the throne in 249 B.C. Lü Pu-wei became Chief Minister, a post he was to hold for twelve years, first under I Jên and then under I Jên's (or perhaps his own) redoubtable son.

As a statesman Lü Pu-wei was not the equal of the great innovator Kung-sun Yang, or of that other remarkable minister who was to follow him, Li Ssu. Yet he had great talents. He was moreover exceptional in being of humble origin, a merchant, possibly the first self-made man to hold his own among the nobles and the literati. Kung-sun Yang and his successors had been descended from princely families and even Li Ssu, although not noble, was a scholar and highly educated. Lü Pu-wei was, by the standards of the court, a nobody.

His self-confidence was none the less unbounded. When a number of scholars whom he had invited to Ch'in because he realized that the state was culturally backward in relation to its neighbours produced an historical encyclopaedia which he claimed to include "all matters pertaining to Heaven, Earth, the ten thousand things (in the universe), and to antiquity and the present" he brought it out under his own name. It was called "The Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lü", and when it was finished he suspended a thousand pieces of gold at the gate of his palace, offering this to anyone who could suggest improving the work by adding or deleting so much as a single word. No one did.

I Jên himself died in 246 B.C. after a reign of only three years, and Prince Chêng, aged then thirteen, came to the throne of Ch'in. In theory Ch'in already claimed the Mandate of Heaven to rule all China, but it remained for Chêng to assert that claim against the other Contending States.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CH'IN SHIH HUANG TI

THE FIRST Universal Emperor, Shih Huang Ti of Ch'in, was described by the historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien, writing about a hundred years after the Emperor's death, as having "a high-pointed nose, slit eyes, pigeon breast, wolf voice, tiger heart; stingy, cringing and graceless". Whatever his physical appearance may have been, it seems unlikely that he was stingy, cringing or graceless. Everything he did, he did on a grand scale. And even against the background of such men as Kung-sun Yang he is remarkable for his strong will and original ideas, ideas so original that even now the Chinese are sometimes reluctant to admit that he ruled over them and influenced their history.

Recent writers find in the sudden rise of Ch'in and the achievements of Shih Huang Ti a parallel to the events of the last few years in China, and in the character of Mao Tze-tung a reflection of that of the Great Universal Emperor. Shih Huang Ti's drastic reorganization of the country can well be compared with that of the Communists. According to one's political sentiments one can then go on to mention that the Ch'in Dynasty fell apart within three years of Shih Huang Ti's death, or to point out that much of what he created is still going strong after two thousand years.

Admittedly he had excellent advice. His mother, the regent and the former wife of Lü Pu-wei, and his grandmother were both remarkable women. Lü Pu-wei continued to rule the government with a firm hand until the young prince was of age, and in 240 B.C. he took as his assistant Li Ssu, who was to become Shih Huang Ti's closest adviser. (Lü Pu-wei himself was eventually involved in a court scandal and banished to Szechuan, where he took poison and died.) Yet there can be little doubt that Shih Huang Ti himself was the leading spirit and that the most revolutionary ideas were his. From the beginning he showed extraordinary understanding, genius and application in both military and political affairs.

Encouraged by Li Ssu he now put into effect throughout the country the same reforms, and others more drastic, that Kung-sun Yang had introduced in the single state of Ch'in. Determined to establish a central government with real power, he eliminated even the boundaries of the states he conquered and split them up into new districts and provinces. He appointed a viceroy, a governor

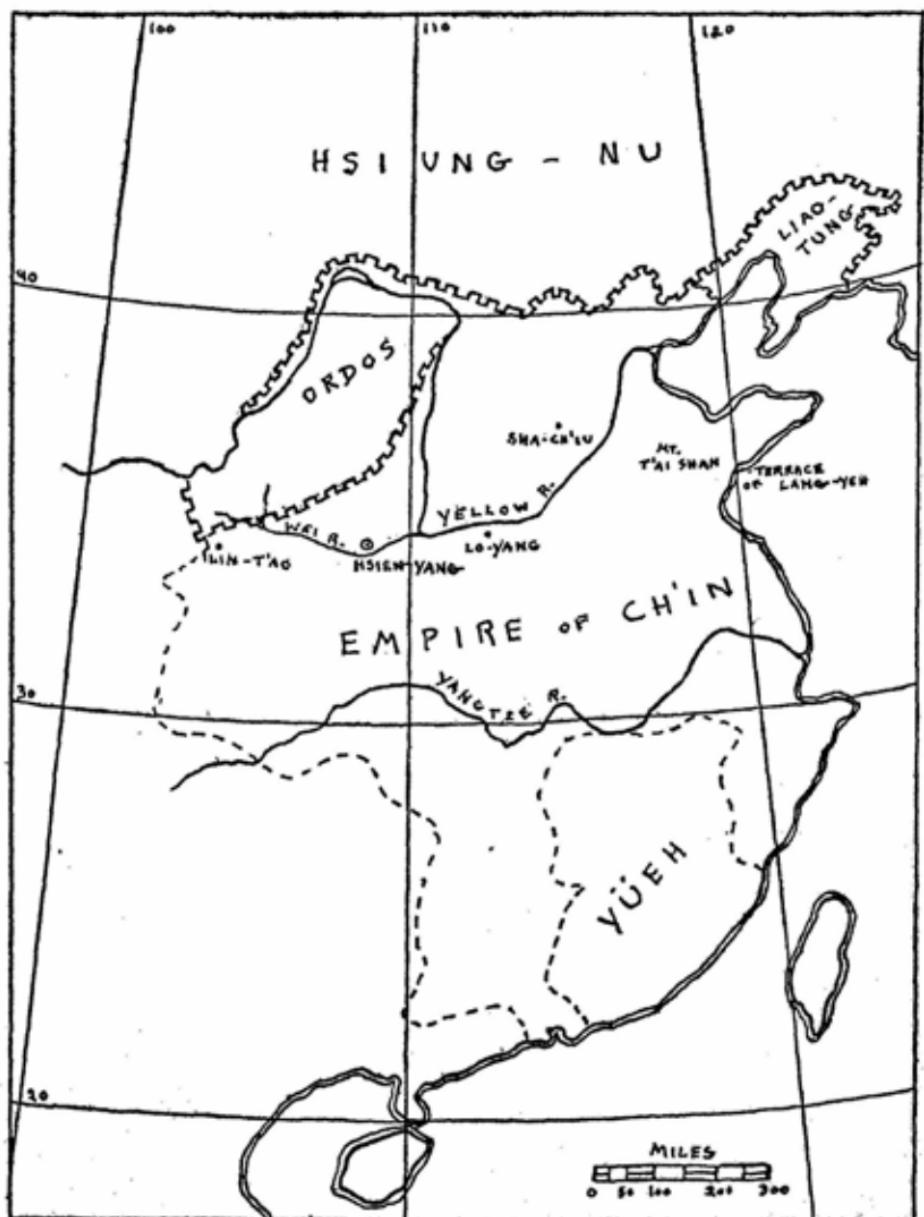
and an assistant governor to rule each province for limited periods only, thus, theoretically at least, making it impossible to re-establish hereditary rule. He refused absolutely to allow the rulers of defeated states to remain as his vassals, and when ministers advised him to install members of his own family on their thrones instead he retorted that he had no intention of replacing the aristocracy he had overthrown with another of his own making. The vassal system itself must be destroyed if the new empire was to endure.

Meanwhile he turned his attention to completing the conquest of the country. Several of the rival states had already been defeated, others had surrendered without fighting, but a few still struggled fiercely to maintain their independence. Han was suppressed and annexed in 230 B.C., and Chao in 228 B.C. Almost the entire population of Han-tan, the capital of Chao and the birthplace of Shih Huang Ti, or Prince Chêng as he then was, were put to the sword because he believed them to have been originally responsible for casting doubts upon his legitimacy.

One of the last states to hold out was Yen, the country in which Peking now lies. Resistance in Yen was led by Prince Tan, who was the son and heir of the ruling prince. Tan had formerly been held as hostage for some time at the court of Ch'in, and according to legend when he demanded his freedom Prince Chêng had told him mockingly that he could go free "whenever the skies pour down grain, crows have white heads, and horses grow horns". Apparently these miracles immediately came to pass, how is not quite clear, and in 230 B.C. Prince Tan was allowed to return to his native state. There he at once threw all his energies into plotting the overthrow of Ch'in. Knowing that the armies of Yen could not possibly face those of Ch'in in battle, he decided that his only hope of saving Yen was to assassinate Prince Chêng, and to this end he enlisted the services of one Ching K'o, a native of Wei, a brawling but courageous adventurer, and a sworn enemy of Chêng.

Ch'in was at that time demanding from Yen the return of a Ch'in general who had taken refuge there, together with compensation in the form of a strip of territory along the frontier. Ching K'o pointed out that whereas if he went to Ch'in empty-handed he would never be able to see Prince Chêng, if he were to pose as an envoy and to carry with him the head of the Ch'in general and a map of the disputed territory he would be received without question at the enemy court. Prince Tan readily agreed that this plan stood the best chance of success, but he refused absolutely to put to death a man who had taken refuge with him.

Ching K'o thereupon paid a formal call upon General Fan, the fugitive from Ch'in, and outlined his idea.



THE WALL OF CH'IN SHIH HUANG TI

"A man of your spirit cannot live in fear and humiliation," he said, "and you alone are powerless against Ch'in. Yet if I on the other hand could carry your head to the Prince of Ch'in I would present it to him with one hand, and with the other I would plunge my dagger into his breast. You and your family would be avenged; I would have saved Yen."

"Indeed, I now live only for revenge," exclaimed General Fan. "If you swear to avenge me, my life is yours!" And he cut his own throat, falling at the feet of Ching K'o.

Ching K'o accordingly set forth, carrying the general's head in a square box and taking with him, rolled up inside the map of Yen's frontier territory, a poisoned dagger, even a scratch from which should have proved fatal. He had one companion. Prince Tan and a few of his friends, already dressed in mourning, escorted the assassin to the frontier and there he took leave of them in an elegy so mournful that it brought tears to the eyes of all who heard it:

"The wind blows softly;  
It is cold by the river Yi.  
Once the young hero is gone,  
He will not return."

This was followed by an inspiring martial tune. Ching K'o stepped into his carriage and rode away without daring to look back at his comrades, who are said to have remained gazing horror-struck after the departing figure, their hair bristling up against their caps.

Ching K'o easily gained access to Prince Chêng, and presented him with the head of General Fan. But as he bent to unroll the map, Chêng's sharp eyes caught sight of the hidden dagger and he leapt to his feet. Ching K'o grabbed him by the sleeve and lunged forward with the weapon, but he was not quite quick enough and the prince broke away and fled down a narrow passage, Ching K'o pursuing him as he dodged behind one column after another.

Meanwhile the Ch'in courtiers, who according to the laws of the state were not allowed to carry arms at court, tried in vain to seize the assassin. An attendant physician hurled his bag of medicine at him. Others shouted to Prince Chêng to draw his own sword, which was unfortunately so long that it was almost impossible to unsheathe while hanging down at his side, and at last he succeeded in doing so, struck at Ching K'o and wounded him in the leg. With a last desperate effort Ching K'o hurled the poisoned dagger at him but it struck one of the bronze pillars and rebounded harmlessly.

Then it is said that Ching K'o laughed philosophically. "This is

my fate," he said, as he fell under the blows of Chêng's sword; "someone else must succeed where I have failed."

This sealed the fate of Yen, and indeed of any further resistance anywhere against the overwhelming strength of Ch'in. The Prince of Yen, Prince Tan's father, had his son put to death for his part in the plot and sent his head to Prince Chêng in a last, despairing effort to appease him, but it was to no avail. Yen ceased to exist as an independent state.

In 223 B.C. Ch'u was defeated and annexed. Shortly afterwards the last remaining state, Ch'i, which had hitherto refused to join any alliance against Ch'in because her frontiers were protected by the intervening states of Yen, Chao and Wei so long as they existed, shared the same fate. By 221 B.C. Chêng was able to proclaim himself ruler of an empire corresponding roughly to modern China.

In that year, resolved that history should begin anew with him, he abolished the title of "Wang" with which previous emperors had been content and took the name of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, or Ch'in First Divine Ruler. He claimed to unite within himself all the qualities of the Three Sovereigns (Huang) and the Five Emperors (Ti) who had been the legendary rulers of China before the establishment of the first dynasty. His heirs were to rule as "Second Divine Ruler", "Third Divine Ruler", and so on into eternity.

The Great Wall was only one of the huge projects upon which Ch'in Shih Huang Ti now embarked. Just outside the capital he built an imperial palace in which the entrance hall alone was said to be five hundred paces by fifty and so high that a sixty-foot banner could easily be unfurled within it, while the upper storey was large enough to contain ten thousand people—although here again "ten thousand" was probably used to mean a large number. Armaments collected from the defeated states were melted and cast into a number of bells and into twelve huge metal statues, reputedly weighing sixty tons each, which were set up around the palace to act as guardians. Along the Wei River where it ran south of the capital the Emperor built replicas of the palaces of every king and prince he had conquered, peopling them with musicians and dancing girls from the courts of the defeated kings. These were enclosed in a great park, which also included suites of rooms for Shih Huang Ti's own wives and concubines, laid out to represent the night sky in the region of the Pole Star, Aquila and the Milky Way.

The capital itself, Hsien-yang, was enlarged, embellished and heavily fortified. In accordance with his policy of centralization Shih Huang Ti ordered twelve hundred of the richest and most powerful families from other parts of the country to move to Hsien-yang, thus concentrating the wealth of the kingdom within its walls.

Radiating out from the capital for six hundred miles he built broad stone roads, replacing what in many places had been no more than cart tracks. In 220 B.C. construction was also started on two other main roads, one running from Shanthaikuan along the coast to a point south of the Yangtze, the other from Shanthaikuan inland, immense causeways three hundred feet wide, raised thirty feet above the countryside, and bordered with cypresses. A central avenue thirty feet wide was reserved for the use of the Emperor when he travelled, other traffic being restricted to the side avenues.

Meanwhile he laid out new canals and enlarged those which already existed, linking several separate rivers up into a network of waterways dependent on the capital. He pushed the boundaries of China as far south as the Red River Delta and colonized the south-east, modern Kwangtung, apparently considering this a good place to settle the vagabonds, criminals and idle subjects who were of no use to him.

An indefatigable worker, he is said to have handled a hundred and twenty pounds of reports, memorials and other papers in a day, although it should be remembered that the "papers" were bulky bamboo tablets. No detail was too small for his attention. Weights and measures were standardized, and even such details as the dimensions of the axles of chariots, and the colour of the bonnets to be worn by the people, were personally regulated by the Emperor. He also introduced such excellent copper coinage that the use of cowry shells for money was gradually abandoned.

None of this weighs in his favour in the scales of Chinese historians. History was written by the scholars, and from first to last the scholars believed that in reforming the administration of the country Shih Huang Ti was tampering with the laws of nature. Perhaps also they, and indeed many of the Chinese people, already looked back upon the time of the saintly legendary emperors Yao and Shun as a Golden Age, and believed that men should work to recreate the past rather than to change it.

The climax of the scholars' opposition came at a banquet given by the Emperor in Hsien-yang in 213 B.C. It was then he took the decision which brought down upon him the wrath of the literati, and for which his name is yet reviled today.

Some seventy scholars and officials were present. One of the ministers proposed a toast to the Emperor and went on to praise his various accomplishments in extravagant terms, describing how he had expanded the empire, held back the barbarians and put an end to civil war.

"May this happiness last forever!" he ended. "Since remote antiquity, no sovereign has equalled you in majesty and power."

He was followed by a discontented academician, who commented sourly that on the contrary the Shang and Chou Dynasties, whose rulers rewarded their worthy ministers and kinsmen by establishing them in independent principalities, had lasted over a thousand years. If this newly-founded dynasty refused to follow their example and persisted in breaking up the country into purely administrative districts, it was not likely to survive for long. "Nothing can endure," he said, "except those things in which we follow the example of antiquity."

This was too much for Li Ssu, who replied with a speech which might equally well have been delivered by Kung-sun Yang.

"The great emperors of antiquity, and those of the dynasties Hsia, Shang and Chou each governed as he thought best at the time. O Emperor, you have done great and lasting things. Why should you imitate the preceding dynasties? I, Li Ssu, say: In their preaching these scholars exalt what was only in order to discredit what is; they build their past utopias in order to blacken, by contrast, the reality. Whenever a new law appears, they carp and cavil; it is they who are responsible for all the criticism among the people. Even here, in your presence, they mock you. For your own good, repress them!"

"I demand that, except for the records of the kingdom of Ch'in, all historical documents be burnt. I demand that, except for the court academicians, whoever possesses a book, and particularly a copy of the Odes or the Annals, be compelled to deliver it to the authorities, who will have it burnt; that after thirty days whoever has not obeyed this decree should be branded and condemned to forced labour. I demand that whoever discusses the text of the Odes and Annals should be put to death, and his corpse exposed in the market place. That those who use these texts to denigrate the present should be exterminated with all their kinsmen. That officials who wittingly close their eyes to infringements of this rule be punished with the same penalties as the offenders. That only treatises on medicine, divination, agriculture and gardening should be exempted, and that all who wish to study the past should now be made to study at an official school!"

This drastic plan probably did not originate with Li Ssu on the spur of the moment. It is said that Kung-sun Yang had had the same idea, but decided that it could not be enforced until the country was united under one government. In any case Shih Huang Ti, who had had enough of being constantly confronted with Yao, Shun and other former monarchs, and of hearing every government action condemned by the scholars, now readily accepted Li Ssu's suggestion. Laws to that effect were immediately enacted.

It may not have been either Shih Huang Ti's or Li Ssu's intention to wipe out the past, although they are often enough accused of trying to do so. It was not the books to which they objected but their use in the hands of the conservative Confucian literary class. Copies of all the proscribed books were kept in the palace library, and scholars employed by the court were allowed to have books of their own. The final and irrevocable "burning of the books", in which the only remaining copies of some works were lost, took place later, in 206 B.C., when Hsien-yang was burnt, pillaged and razed to the ground, and its imperial library utterly destroyed, by the war-lord Hsiang Yü.

Nevertheless, the decree was rigorously enforced. Those who refused to surrender their books were branded and sent to labour on the building of the Great Wall. Four hundred and sixty scholars were put to death in the capital for continuing to expound the Classics, and it was said that the soil of the plot where they were buried was so enriched by this literate blood that melons grew there even in winter. (The site on which the books were actually burnt, on the other hand, is reputed to have remained black and bare of all vegetation from that day to this.) Whether these four hundred and sixty scholars were buried alive in ditches specially dug for that purpose, or whether statements to that effect were the result of a misreading, possibly deliberate, on the part of early historians of the word "to kill" as "to bury" is still doubtful. Either way, they were killed, and the idea that they were buried alive only added one more detail to Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's already grim reputation for cruelty. For two thousand years his epitaph has been: "Fen Shu K'en Ju"—"He burned the Books and he buried the Scholars!"

The existing books, written for the most part on cumbersome bamboo tablets, were difficult to conceal and easy to burn. But many scholars knew such Classics as the Shih King, consisting of poetry and odes, by heart and the fact that all copies might be destroyed did not obliterate them from memory, especially as the ban was of short duration. The first Emperor of the succeeding dynasty, the Han, who boasted that he had conquered the empire on horseback and meant to rule it that way, had no great sympathy with the scholars and he neither repealed nor enforced the edict against the books. But it was officially repealed in 191 B.C. by his successor, and some twenty years later an extensive search for the missing books was instituted. Living men could then still quote the Classics.

A few gaps undoubtedly remained and a few manuscripts were permanently lost. Chinese scholars, on hearing of some western discovery unknown in China, will point out that it was probably already well known in ancient times and the knowledge lost with

the Burning of the Books. On the other hand some of the "classics" which reappeared during the Han dynasty were forgeries, for which it was easy at that time to claim high antiquity. Even now historians still argue about the genuineness or spuriousness of certain works, and the different interpretations of the Ancient Text and Modern Text schools throw a very different light on Confucius and his position in Chinese philosophy. According to the Ancient Text school he was the successor of the rulers of the Golden Age, the transmitter of their ideals, and he is therefore infallible. According to the Modern Text school he was an original thinker and an innovator who quoted the ancients only in order to strengthen his own case for political reform, and therefore nothing in his doctrine should inhibit further political changes. The Burning of the Books has thus added fuel through the centuries to many a Chinese literary controversy.

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti further showed his contempt for the literati by erecting a memorial to himself on the sacred mountain T'ai Shan which consisted of a perfectly plain granite shaft, fifteen feet high, which he called the "Letterless Mountain". But he did not hesitate to set up engraved monuments as well, each mounted on a pedestal and sheltered by a pavilion, which eulogized his reign and his achievements and proclaimed that thenceforward the imperial power would remain united in a single line, that war would cease, and that the Black-haired People would forever live in peace. The inscriptions added that all this had already been immortalized in poetry, but that only stone was enduring enough to do justice to the Great First Emperor. Such memorials were erected on all the sacred mountains, in the capital, and on the Terrace of Lang-yeh, looking out to sea.

Shih Huang Ti was a great traveller, and loved the sea. Water was moreover the "element" of Ch'in and they attributed their successes to the influence of the genie of the Yellow River. In later years he was much attracted by a Taoist belief that three islands lying off the coast of China were the home of the immortals. There, so it was said, were to be found the long-haired tortoise, the crane, the sacred fungus and other emblems of immortality. There the Taoist genii drank from the Sweet-wine Fountain of Jade, which rendered them both inebriated and immortal. Ships sailing too near the magic isles were usually blown back by strong winds, but anyone who did succeed in reaching them might share the drug of immortality.

Shih Huang Ti was neither the first nor the last emperor who determined to live forever. In later centuries quite a number of emperors died from the effects of elixirs they swallowed in the quest

for eternal life. No longer young, fearing death and perhaps fearing even more for the fate of the empire after his death, the First Supreme Ruler turned desperately to any magic or alchemy that promised immortality.

At least two expeditions to these fabled islands of P'eng Lai were fitted out for the Emperor by an unscrupulous quack, Hsü Shih. Or perhaps Hsü Shih believed in his own adventures. He returned from the first voyage to tell how a genii whom he had encountered far out at sea had guided him to the islands and shown him the palaces of the immortals there, and even the jade rock from which flowed the elixir of life, but had sent him away again with the message that the presents he had brought from the Emperor were insufficient. Apparently what was needed were youths and maidens of good family, skilled artisans, tools and grain.

Equipped with all these by the credulous Son of Heaven, Hsü Shih set off once more. His expedition was never heard of again. It may be they were lost at sea, or it may be that they settled on some island nearby with which Hsü Shih was familiar. It may well be, as many believe, that he and his companions were the original colonizers of Japan, and on that assumption temples have been built to his memory in Japan.

Shih Huang Ti's fear of death was coupled with a fear of assassination, perhaps not unfounded after the attempt on his life by Ching K'o and two later attempts which also came near success. He never spent two consecutive nights in the same place, nor allowed anyone to know where he would sleep. This was not difficult, since the two hundred and seventy palaces which he had built within a radius of sixty miles of the capital were connected with one another by walled passages along which he could ride unseen, and each palace was furnished with its own "tents, canopies, bells, drums and beautiful women" for his entertainment.

When a meteorite inscribed, "Ch'in Shih Huang Ti will die and his empire will be destroyed" was discovered he suspected a trick and ordered everyone who had had anything to do with its finding to be decapitated. Yet, superstitious as he had become, he probably half-believed this to be a divine warning. Another similar event which had a far greater effect on him, and on China's history, was a prophecy made by a supposed Immortal who lived as a hermit in the mountains near Shanthaikuan. He sent the Emperor a cryptic message: "Hu will destroy Ch'in."

"Hu" was one of the names by which the northern barbarians were commonly known, and this prophecy was probably one of the main factors in Shih Huang Ti's anxiety during the last years of his reign to complete the building of the Great Wall. It was after the

receipt of the hermit's message that he sent General Mêng T'ien at the head of three hundred thousand men to take charge of the building of the Wall, and of its defence against the Hsiung-nu. He seemed driven by a new sense of urgency, as though he realized that he had only a few years left and was determined to see the completion of the Wall with his own eyes.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CH'IN SHIH HUANG TI'S WALL; FACT AND FABLE

THERE IS a legend that soon after he ascended the throne Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's soul visited the moon. From that cold planet he looked down upon his kingdom, tiny and far distant, and then and there he determined that as soon as he returned to earth he would build one great Boundary Line enclosing the whole country. Originally he intended this to be a horseshoe-shaped wall, open only along the eastern seaboard, but he later came to the conclusion that since the mountains of Tibet protected the west, and the Yangtze River the south, it was only the northern frontier that must have an unbroken barrier. Invasion always came from the north. "Have no fear of the tiger from the south," an old proverb advised; "Beware the rooster from the north!"

The earlier walls of Yen, Chao and Ch'in, the states with borders contiguous to the northern barbarians, had been largely futile. Either the negligence or the intrigues of one of their neighbours always enabled an enemy to outflank them. The Great Wall on the contrary was the line of a united empire, a final boundary between China and the land of the Tartars. The boundary was often enough ignored in later years, crossed by invaders from both sides, but it was always there and had always to be taken into account. Some emperors also used its existence as a reason for not pressing their campaigns against the Huns when they might have done so; Shih Huang Ti, they argued, had abandoned all the land outside the Wall to the Tartars and it was rightfully theirs forever.

Already in 244 B.C. Shih Huang Ti had strengthened the existing walls and built new fortifications at three passes through which the Hsiung-nu most often attacked Ch'in. He seems to have thought at first that a string of strategically located fortresses and towers would be sufficient to restrain them, and only later decided in the face of renewed attacks that he must have a single, solid rampart. Construction on the Great Wall proper was probably started about 221 B.C., for although the date is often given as 214 B.C. the structure was practically complete before his death in 210 B.C. and it seems unlikely that so much could have been accomplished in four years.

His main objectives in the huge undertaking were undoubtedly to restrain the rising tide of the Huns, and to separate his empire once and for all from the outer world. He wanted to be able to con-

centrate his energies on domestic reform, and to do so he must secure the frontier. He wanted a closed economy, unconcerned with the rest of the world.

There were other reasons. He must have been to some extent influenced by the prophecy that "Hu" would destroy Ch'in, and determined that no road into the empire should be left open to the "Hu", or barbarians. Yet there is no evidence that, like some later emperors, Shih Huang Ti ever regarded the Wall as a substitute for a strong army and a strong kingdom. He did not expect the Wall itself to provide adequate protection. It was a boundary, a line foreigners crossed at their peril, a defence in the same way that city walls were defences, but it was designed to increase the efficiency of a large standing army, not to replace it.

Excess manpower may indeed have been another reason for the Wall being built at the time it was. With the country now pacified, the great forces of Ch'in no longer needed to be kept at the same strength. The armies of the conquered States had also to be employed somehow. The Emperor thus had at his disposal an enormous body of men, a labour force which it was essential to absorb immediately if the country were to remain stable, for if they were suddenly thrown out of work they would provide a nucleus of unrest and possibly rebellion. Public works were the easiest if not the only answer to the problem. It is estimated that by the time the Wall was completed at least a million men must have been employed in its construction, and one has only to remember that roads, canals and huge imperial palaces were being built at the same time to have some idea of the numbers of men available. Some may have been slaves; certainly it is unlikely that most of the workers had any choice as to where or how they worked.

The Great Wall was also a useful penitentiary. Everyone who had been convicted of any crime, and under the laws of Ch'in almost anything might be a crime, venal judges, officials who were accused of neglecting their duties, scholars who persisted in discussing the Classics and the virtues of antiquity, princes and noblemen of the conquered States whom it was desirable to get out of the way, vagabonds and the poor, all were sent to the Wall.

Many, probably thousands, died there. The Wall earned the grim title of "The Longest Cemetery in the World". But legend and folklore have multiplied their number, and hatred of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti has added gruesome details of their deaths. It is said that workmen who fell behind were simply thrown into the section of the Wall where they were working and buried alive. One legend tells how so many hundreds of men from one district in the Ordos alone were buried thus at work, beaten down into the structure like earth,

that their comrades escaped in a body and fled south, taking refuge in inaccessible mountain country. Their descendants still reputedly live hidden there, a race of hairy, wild pygmies who flee in terror if anyone approaches them, lest they be dragged back to work on the Wall.

It is also said that the overseers were instructed to put lime in the food of their workmen so that they would eat less and less, and to bury those who finally died inside the Wall to act as guardian spirits. There may be a grain of truth in the story. A few men quite likely were deliberately buried in the Wall, either to appease those demons who were believed to inhabit the northern deserts and who were expected to be strongly opposed to the building of the Wall, or simply to protect the rampart. It is a widespread custom, which persisted in Europe until recently, to bury someone under the door-post or gate of a new building so that his soul will remain on guard there. Not long before this moreover the Ch'ins had adopted the "barbarian" custom of throwing a maiden into the Yellow River every year to appease the river god, and there is no reason to think that they would have hesitated to use the same means of bribing other gods or spirits.

Many stories tell of the suicides of wives or maidens who came to seek their lovers at the Wall, and found them dead. It is said that one prince from each of the States overthrown by Shih Huang Ti was forced to lead a contingent of his own men to work on the Wall, which seems indeed not unlikely, and that one such prince died there under mysterious circumstances. His wife, determined to bring his body back to his native land for burial, came in search of him, but all she knew was that he must be buried somewhere inside the Wall and it must have seemed a hopeless quest. As she stood disconsolately beside the great rampart somewhere near Nankou a spirit appeared to her and told her that she should cut her finger and then hold her hand out in front of her, following the drops of blood as they fell. She did so, and before long she came to a miraculous opening in the Wall, within which lay the body of her husband.

Local legend adds that this hole was never repaired and that when the first railroad from China to the north was built early this century it enlarged and made use of the same hole. Sceptics may point out that the Peking-Kalgan railroad runs under the Wall at Nankou through a tunnel, and that a hole dating from the time of Shih Huang Ti could hardly exist in the fabric of a wall built many centuries later, but it is a pleasant fancy.

The story that thousands of men were actually buried in the Wall may have been based on the account of how at one time,

when the difficulties of construction seemed insurmountable, Shih Huang Ti consulted a soothsayer.

"Never until ten thousand men have been buried under this wall," said the soothsayer, "will you be able to complete it."

Even Ch'in Shih Huang Ti hesitated to immolate ten thousand men at a stroke. Instead he ordered his ministers to find him a man whose name contained the character "wan", or ten thousand, and when such a man had been found he was immediately buried in the foundations of the Wall. Thereafter the work proceeded smoothly.

Nearly five hundred miles of new wall are believed to have been built in the years from 221 to 210 B.C., in addition to work done on old walls and on establishing fortified camps inside the line of the Wall. Shih Huang Ti personally supervised the construction of the fortifications along the coast, where the Wall ran down to the sea; ships loaded with iron and with enormous stones were sunk in the water there as a foundation and a great bulwark of stone raised upon them, surmounted by the fort of Shanhakuan.

Despite the speed with which it was completed, the Wall was solidly built. In mountainous areas two parallel furrows were chiselled out in the rock about twenty-five feet apart, and squared granite blocks were laid on this foundation up to a height of a few feet. Bricks twenty-two and a half inches long, moulded from a special clay and baked, were laid by the bricklayers along either side of these blocks; laid as "headers", not "stretchers", they provided a thick outer shell and the space between them was then filled with earth well rammed down. The use of mortar was known, and the bricks were cemented together with a fine white mortar so hard that it is said no nail could be driven into it.

This mortar, the composition of which is apparently a lost art, has long been believed to possess special medicinal properties, and is still scraped out of the crevices for use in curing cuts, burns or, taken internally, stomach ache. For internal use, a pill the size and shape of a lotus seed should be swallowed. For external use one is advised to "take sufficient of the Magic Mortar, pulverize, mash an unborn mouse into the powdered lime, and apply", but if the mouse is not available oil may be substituted.

In places near Nankou the Wall crowns the summit of mountains so steep that goats can scarcely climb there; any invader who could get over the rocks could as easily get over the Wall. How then was it built? According to the local tradition bricks for the Wall were tied to the tails of goats, the only animals who could possibly carry a load to such inaccessible heights; and whether or not one believes this tale, it does seem incredible when you look up at the mountains

that bricks and stones could have been transported there by any other means.

Further west in Shensi and Kansu, however, as we have seen, the Wall more often followed the line of least resistance. There the workmen erected a wooden frame, watered the loose earth which they had dug out of a parallel moat and rammed this into the casing, usually, but not always, facing it with a thin layer of brick and stone. The wooden framework was removed and re-erected for the next stretch of Wall. Often in those wind-swept western areas they also built a second and even a third wall, as well as a moat, on the desert side so that the everlasting dust would drift against these and not against the main wall. Less spectacular than the eastern Wall, these ramparts of Shensi and Kansu nevertheless served their purpose well. As late as 1908 the greater part of the western wall remained standing to a height of over fifteen feet, with towers rising as high again.

The statesman and general largely responsible for carrying out Shih Huang Ti's plans for the Wall was Mêng T'ien, a man of enterprise and originality. He is credited with inventing, among other things, a kind of harpsichord and the writing brush still used by the Chinese today. The writing brush actually seems to have been known long before Ch'in times, possibly even in the Shang Dynasty, but Mêng T'ien may have introduced an improved variety; he is in any case generally recognized and honoured as its inventor, and remains even today the patron saint of brush-sellers.

Mêng T'ien was appointed commander-in-chief of the forces of Ch'in in 221 B.C., and soon afterwards marched north against the Hsiung-nu with an army of three hundred thousand men. Having first driven the "barbarians" completely out of the great loop of the Yellow River and north into the steppes, he then set this vast host to work on building the Wall. His own headquarters were centrally located within the Yellow River loop, but from there he travelled widely and inspected all sections of the building. He not only went as far east as the sea at Shanhaiquan, but also supervised repairs on the existing willow fence or palisade which protected Liaotung Peninsula from the Tartars.

Credit for the speed and efficiency with which the Wall was erected is undoubtedly due to Mêng T'ien and his three hundred thousand soldiers, with the help of innumerable other conscripts. But later generations, seeing the length of this astonishing rampart, found it hard to believe that human beings could ever have built it unaided. Remembrance and hatred of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti combined with their awe and incredulity to create the image of a super-human taskmaster, possessed of miraculous powers. The Emperor,

it was said, had owned a magic "Drive the Mountains" whip, with which he could shift an entire mountain range, or make the Yellow River stand back while his men worked. He had had a mammoth shovel that would throw up a third of a mile of earth at one time. Moreover when the Wall was originally built men themselves were twelve feet tall and able to work much harder than they do now, and if you do not believe it you can see the leg-bones of those ancient giants, measuring four feet from knee to ankle, which have been unearthed from the Wall.

One legend has it that the entire Wall was built in a single day. Yet another tells how the men who worked on the Wall toiled for so long without a break that in the western areas, where the yellow dust blows day after day, dust lodged in their hair, and grass grew there.

But Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's most valuable legendary asset was undoubtedly his magic horse. Some say that it was a white horse; others that it was coal-black, with red mane and flaming tail, and eyes like lamps, and could cover a thousand li in a day. He could also fly, and his ears were so exceptionally small that they did not interfere with the speed of his flight—a very early example of streamlining. His hair pointed forward like that of a dragon, and some authorities therefore assume that he was in fact a dragon in disguise.

This wonderful creature carried Shih Huang Ti along the entire northern frontier of the empire, stamping three times every li, and wherever he stamped a tower sprang up. Yet at other times the horse must have moved slowly, for it seems that the meandering line of the Wall was originally marked out by this same animal as he wandered westward, grazing. A saddle was tied to his tail to leave a track behind, and the architects followed him, pegging out the line for the builders who followed them. Once, however, the workmen stopped for tea, a dust storm blew up, and when they resumed their work they could find no trace of either the horse or its footprints, so they continued building west along the same line in the hope of catching him up. After some time they realized that they must have gone wrong and, the dust storm having cleared, sent a scout out to look for the horse. He was found to be heading north-west at quite a different angle, and there was nothing for it but to abandon the last forty li of wall and start all over again.

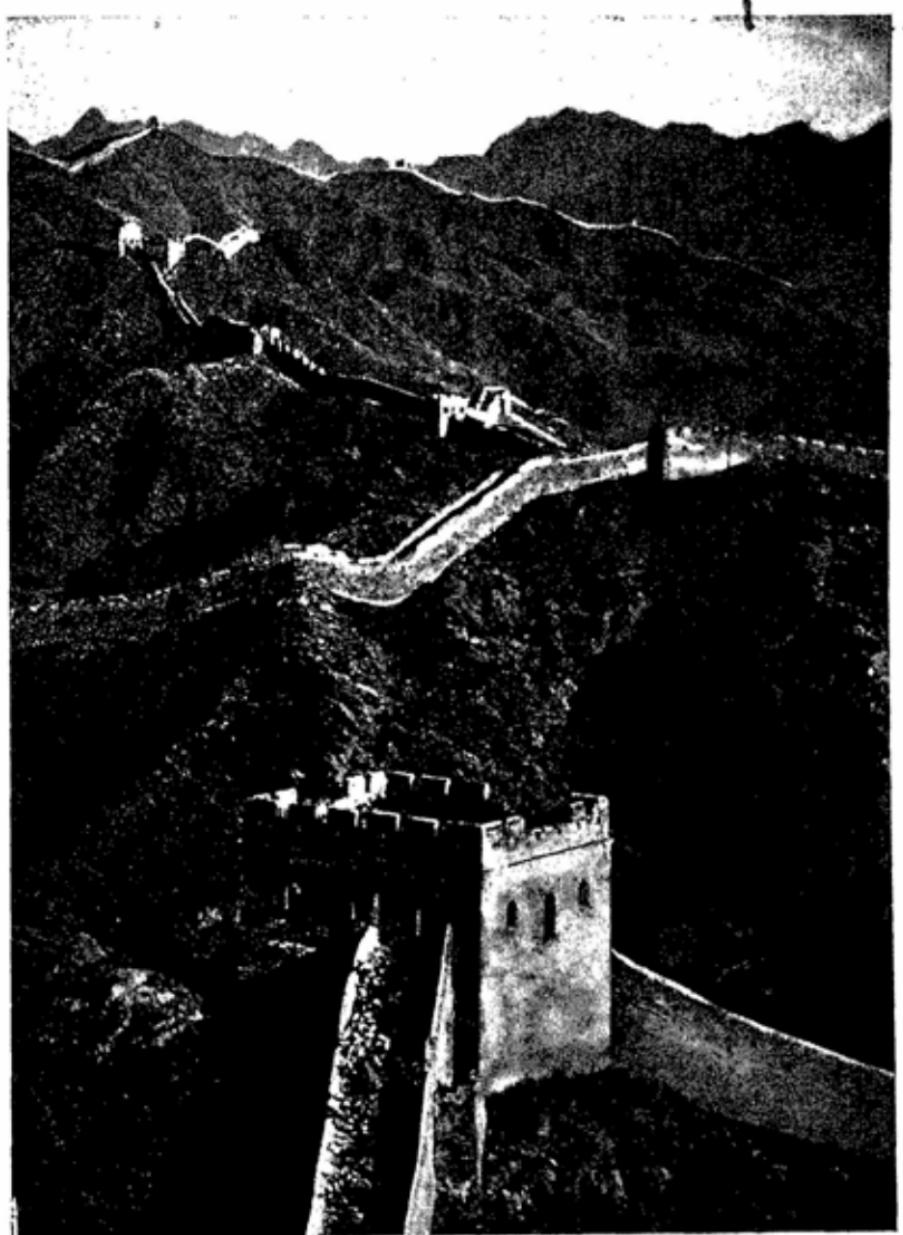
(This at least explains the existence of an abandoned stretch of wall forty li long, running nowhere and apparently quite unconnected with the main line.)

Shih Huang Ti's "Drive the Mountains" whip apparently only increased the need for human workmen. It was like a monstrous

machine devouring all who served it. And according to legend the Emperor acted as his own overseer, driving his slaves on with great cruelty and a complete disregard for their sufferings. Many died of exhaustion, and others were only saved at last when the Emperor fell in love with a beautiful girl who was the daughter of a master mason and she refused to marry him because of her sympathy with the ill-used workmen on the Wall. When he insisted, she killed herself.

On her arrival in the Other World she immediately told the Dragon King there what had happened, described how ruthlessly the Wall was being built, and begged him to put a stop to it one way or another. The Dragon King accordingly sent his own wife to earth in the shape of an irresistibly beautiful woman, who first won Shih Huang Ti's affections and then persuaded him to let her borrow the magic whip. No sooner had he given it to her than she carried it away with her to the underworld. Thereafter Shih Huang Ti could no longer prepare great stretches of the Wall at such tremendous speed, and the workers were no longer driven to their death trying to keep up with him.

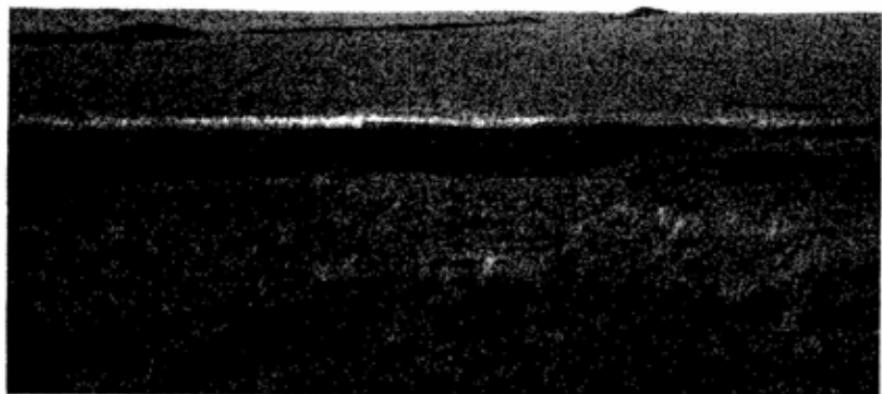
Many other fairy tales and fables have grown up around the Wall, and its creator. It is not always easy to know where fact ends and fiction begins. Nor is it surprising that men should have hought some supernatural agency to be involved. Those endless miles of wall, those ramparts, those myriad towers would do credit to the giant race supposed to have built them, even had their master actually been equipped with an earth-moving whip.



The Great Wall in the mountains north of Peking



Another view of the Wall



Remains of an old frontier wall in Inner Mongolia

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE FALL OF CH'IN

IN SPITE of all his efforts, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti did not become immortal. During a tour of the eastern provinces in the summer of 210 B.C. he fell ill and on the 18th of July he died, aged fifty, at Sha Ch'iu in modern Hopei. Refusing ever to admit the possibility of death, he had not named an heir to succeed him. (Although he had, inconsistently, prepared his own tomb.) His eldest son, Fu Su, was in disfavour because he had been so rash as to protest against the execution of the four hundred and sixty scholars the year before, and he had been exiled to the northern frontier to serve under Mêng T'ien in building the Great Wall. A younger son, Hu Hai, who was the Emperor's favourite, was with him on tour. Yet he must have realized which of his sons was best fitted to succeed him, for before he died he handed Hu Hai the seals of the empire for safe-keeping, together with a letter addressed to Fu Su in which he proclaimed the latter, as eldest son, his heir.

Temptation was too much for Hu Hai. With the seals of office in his own hand, and his brother a thousand miles away, it was perhaps not surprising that this weak, vain and pleasure-loving prince decided to take the throne for himself. What is more surprising is that he and his tutor and familiar, the eunuch Chao Kao, succeeded in persuading Li Ssu to join their conspiracy on the grounds that if the Emperor's death became known immediately there might be uprisings in the capital, and that in the time it would take Fu Su to return from the frontier civil war might well have broken out. It was a plausible theory. There had already been several local rebellions, and discontent was widespread. People were protesting, not without reason, that the building of the Wall and Shih Huang Ti's other great public works and palaces had drained the treasury and impoverished the land. The dispossessed feudal lords were still restive. It needed only a spark to set off a major revolution.

Li Ssu moreover, although a loyal and an honourable man, may have been influenced by the fear that if Fu Su became Emperor he would bring Mêng T'ien back to the capital with him, and might make him Chief Minister. He probably believed that he himself would have a better chance of retaining power and of carrying on the policies of government so close to his heart under a weak ruler

such as Hu Hai, whom he could control. If so, he was rapidly disillusioned.

Letting it be known that the Emperor was ill, Hu Hai, Chao Kao and Li Ssu allowed no one but themselves to approach the imperial carriage. There they pretended to be speaking to the Emperor, and receiving his instructions; food was served to the carriage, and accepted by a eunuch whom they had bribed to help them and who remained hidden within. When it began to seem, being summer, as though the odour of the corpse might become noticeable Li Ssu ordered a hundred pounds of dried fish—a delicacy with a pungent smell of which Ch'in Shih Huang Ti was known to be very fond—loaded on each of the chariots which escorted the imperial carriage. Any other smell was smothered by the reek of fish. And thus they reached the capital without the Emperor's death becoming known.

Meanwhile the conspirators destroyed the note intended for Fu Su and substituted a letter reputedly written by the Emperor. This letter, having named Hu Hai as the Heir Apparent, went on to say:

"As to Fu Su, who, never having done anything worthy of merit himself, yet dares to complain and speak ill of all I do; and as to Mêng T'ien, who has not been able to correct my son's faults during this past year; I permit them both to take their own lives."

Under the circumstances there was no reason why Fu Su on receiving such a letter, sealed with the imperial seal, should not have believed it to be genuine. He knew nothing of his father's death. He himself was already in disgrace, and far from court. But Mêng T'ien, with whom he had established very friendly relations and to whom he now showed the letter, was less readily deceived.

"Prince, do nothing precipitate," he said. "Can we be sure that this letter comes from your father and my master? Is it likely that he would send me to the frontier with three hundred thousand men, send you as second-in-command, and then order us to kill ourselves without even naming a replacement? It would be inciting us to rebel. From which I conclude that the message is forged. Let us at least wait for confirmation."

"When a father orders his son to commit suicide," said Fu Su, "it would be against all filial piety to ask him to repeat his words." And he killed himself.

Mêng T'ien refused to follow his example. Instead he set off at once for the capital, with only a small bodyguard, whereupon he was arrested and imprisoned by Hu Hai's henchmen; his brother Mêng I, who had also been one of Shih Huang Ti's most trusted ministers, was arrested at the same time. Hu Hai would probably have spared their lives, as would Li Ssu, but the eunuch Chao Kao bore an ancient grudge against the Mêngs and spitefully insisted

that the entire family must be eliminated if the new Emperor was to rule in peace. When Mêng T'ien heard the sentence he exclaimed ruefully:

"My family has served the Ch'ins faithfully for three generations. Had I wished to rebel, with three hundred thousand loyal men under my command, nothing could have been easier; yet I would rather die than ever take up arms against the imperial house." Then he sighed. "What crime have I before Heaven?" he demanded. "I die without fault!"

So saying, he swallowed poison, but before he died he suddenly added: "Indeed, yes, I have committed a crime for which I must answer. Beginning at Lin-t'ao, and extending to Liaotung, I have built ramparts and dug ditches over more than ten thousand li, and in that distance it is impossible that I should not have cut through the veins of the earth at some point. That is my crime."

With these last words Mêng T'ien bore witness to the deeply-rooted Chinese belief that any excavation of the earth was likely to inflict injuries on nature which would have to be avenged. Even in the sixteenth century A.D. when the Ming Emperor Wan Li fell ill from no apparent cause at about the same time that mining operations were started in Szechuan, orders to dig the mine were immediately cancelled; the Son of Heaven recovered.

One of Hu Hai's first duties after he had secured the throne was to carry out the burial of his father. The First Divine Emperor seems to have intended to remain symbolically at least the sovereign of his newly created empire, or perhaps of an otherworldly but identical empire, after death. To that end he had made the empire his tomb.

Some years before he had built a huge artificial tumulus south of the River Wei, at the foot of Mount Li and possibly connected with the mountain by subterranean passages. Seven hundred thousand men are said to have been put to work on this, although perhaps the figure should be taken with a grain of salt. Within the tomb the world was represented by a great bronze relief map of China, modelled into hills and valleys and accented by the peaks of the sacred mountains. Rivers such as the Huang Ho and the Yangtze, and the sea, were reproduced by channels filled with quicksilver, the flow from one to another being regulated by a series of complicated machines. It is said that the sarcophagus itself, boat-shaped, floated on a river of quicksilver twelve feet deep and half a mile wide, but the word for "quicksilver" might also and perhaps more reasonably be interpreted "water limpid as silver". Grouped around the river stood miniature houses, palaces and other buildings copied from those of the real world and lavishly furnished with all manner of precious things. The domed roof was a replica of the night sky

and its constellations, and the scene was illuminated by enormous candles of seals' fat, expected to burn for years.

The late Emperor was buried in the ninth month of the year. Great treasure was buried with him, as were all of his wives and concubines except those who had given birth to a son. Ingenious precautions were taken against tomb-robbers: crossbows which discharged arrows and stones in the direction of anyone approaching the sarcophagus, knives which sprang out if anyone touched the treasure, machines which were made to imitate the sound of thunder as soon as any intruder entered the great hall.

Once the final ceremonies had been completed and the long tunnel leading into the tomb blocked up, the unsuspecting artisans who had put the final touches to this work were trapped in one of the outer passages by the lowering of a hidden gate and buried alive. The secrecy of the arrangements inside the tomb was thus ensured; the Emperor was also provided with a living escort to accompany him into the next world. Finally the entrance was sealed, and camouflaged with earth and grass.

The location of this mound was exceptionally auspicious, lying between the river on the north which symbolized a dragon in motion, and the mountains on the south which symbolized a dragon at rest. As for dimensions, it is estimated to have been larger than the Great Pyramid, with each side measuring nearly three hundred and fifty yards, although not of course of the same solid construction. Its four sides faced the four points of the compass. It still stands, or at least a huge, somewhat worn tumulus in that location can still be pointed out as the grave of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti.

Although no trace of any temple remains nearby, there must originally have been a temple or building of some kind, for Shih Huang Ti is credited with having introduced the custom of offering sacrifices at a shrine beside the grave. "Anciently there was no sacrificing at tombs," so say the annals, "but Shih Huang Ti of the House of Ch'in erected a temple at the side of his tomb, and this was imitated by the Han Dynasty, and has not since been abolished."

The grave, as might be expected, was haunted. For a long time people believed that they could hear a cock crowing from inside the mound; and during the fourteenth century a curious light appeared above it every night for weeks, growing progressively brighter until it suddenly disappeared with the coming of daylight. Men shunned the neighbourhood of the tomb, ignoring as best they could both its existence and the memory of the man who built it.

Two thousand years later, in the eighteenth century, the Emperor Ch'ien Lung made a pilgrimage to this same valley of the Wei River which has been the site of so many of China's ancient capitals.

To commemorate his visit he ordered monuments or commemorative tablets erected at every one of the numerous imperial tombs in that area which did not already possess such a monument, with the single exception of the tomb of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. So long did the hatred of his name persist.

Shih Huang Ti's dynasty survived him by only three years. Hu Hai was voluptuous, extravagant and cruel. He deferred in everything to Chao Kao, a man who cared only for power but who had not the ability to use it. The devoted Li Ssu must often and bitterly have regretted that he had chosen to support Hu Hai, whom he now tried unsuccessfully to restrain, against the rightful heir, but he had not long to brood over his mistake; he himself was soon accused of treason by Chao Kao, confessed under torture, and was publicly sawn asunder in the market place. Lest this example not be sufficient to discourage other ministers from disagreeing with him, Chao Kao, sure of his control over the young Emperor, one day presented his master with a stag.

"Here is a horse for Your Majesty," he said.

Hu Hai, now Erh Shih Huang Ti, or the Second Divine Emperor, laughed. "Surely this is a stag," he protested.

Chao Kao turned to the assembled ministers and demanded whether they did not believe the animal to be a horse. Most remained silent, one or two nodded their heads dubiously, but a few replied, "Why no, this is certainly a stag."

Within a few weeks all those who had spoken had been done away with on one pretext or another. No one thereafter attempted to argue with Chao Kao.

By this time rebellion had broken out in all parts of the country, and several of the kingdoms destroyed by Ch'in Shih Huang Ti had declared themselves independent again. In a fruitless effort to appease them Chao Kao eventually murdered his helpless puppet, Hu Hai, and placed upon the throne Hu Hai's nephew, the son of Fu Su, proclaiming him however not Emperor of China but King of the State of Ch'in only. It seemed as though Shih Huang Ti's hard-won unity had been ephemeral after all and as though the Contending States would now rise again to divide the spoils of "China".

The new ruler of Ch'in might possibly have saved the dynasty had he come to the throne a year or so before. His first action was to order the execution of Chao Kao. But it was too late. Ch'in had thrown away the Mandate of Heaven. In the following year this last unfortunate King of Ch'in sealed up the imperial seals and insignia, dressed himself in common clothes, tied a cord around his neck in token of submission and—in a chariot drawn by white

horses to symbolize that he was in mourning—rode out of the capital and presented both himself and the seals to Liu Pang, strongest of the rebel generals. Liu Pang courteously dismounted from his horse and with his own hands removed the cord from the Prince's neck, rebuking those of his followers who urged him to put the youth to death there and then, but he did not refuse to accept the imperial seals.

Thus the Ch'in Dynasty came to an end. And thus the prophecy that it would be destroyed by "Hu" was fulfilled, although not as Ch'in Shih Huang Ti had expected.

If Liu Pang had been able to enter the capital and establish control of the country at that time, untold suffering and destruction could have been avoided and probably none of the ancient books would have been irretrievably lost, but Liu Pang was only one among several warlords who were fighting for supreme power and his rivals were considerably less scrupulous than himself. It was one of these, Hsiang Yü, who finally murdered the deposed King of Ch'in and who captured and sacked Hsien-yang.

The great capital of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti was burnt to the ground, and fires continued to smoulder among the ruins for three months and more. The imperial library, the great palaces outside the city, the huge bronze guardian statues, all were destroyed. Shih Huang Ti's fabulous tomb, fortified against tomb-robbers as against the ravages of time, was broken open by Hsiang Yü and all its treasures looted. Not only that. He ordered the body of the First Universal Emperor burnt and his ashes cast to the winds.

Four years of bitter civil war followed before Liu Pang, in 202 B.C., could ascend the imperial throne as undisputed ruler of all China. Yet so firmly had the detested dictator done his work that the empire survived. The Han Dynasty now founded by Liu Pang had only to consolidate and strengthen what the Emperor of Ch'in had created. The greatness of Han, which the Chinese like to remember in calling themselves "Sons of Han", was based on that of Shih Huang Ti. Modern historians may argue as to whether or not Ch'in Shih Huang Ti did abolish feudalism or only changed its form, they may dismiss his society as based on slave labour, or revile him for his cruelties, but it is hard to deny that the Ch'in Dynasty was a decisive period in Chinese history and that much of its work was constructive. The Great Wall, although the most obvious, is perhaps neither the most important nor even the most enduring monument to the tyrant of Ch'in.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE HANS AND THE HUNS

“The Huns have no trade but battle and carnage;  
They have no fields or ploughlands,  
But only wastes where white bones lie

Among yellow sands. . . .”

“*Fighting South of the Ramparts*,” by LI PO  
Translated by ARTHUR WALEY

WHEN IT suited them to do so the Hsiung-nu and other Tartar tribes claimed kinship with the Chinese royal house. One of the sons of the legendary Yellow Emperor, Huang Ti, they said, had inherited the northern regions as his share of his father's kingdom early in the third millennium B.C. and his descendants had ruled there ever since. Moreover in about 1500 B.C. when T'ang the Completer overthrew the Hsia Dynasty and dethroned the last, degenerate descendant of Yü the Great, the son and heir of this defeated Emperor fled north into the desert and settled in what is now Mongolia. There, according to one version, he lived among the wild beasts and dared not come into contact with men. According to another, he adopted the dress and customs of the northern tribes and became their king. Possibly it amounted to much the same thing in the eyes of the Chinese; they looked upon the barbarians as being scarcely different from wild animals, and believed the Turks in particular to be descended from a wolf.

Whatever the origin of the nomad tribes, whether or not they were basically of the same stock as the Chinese and developed along different lines because of the different terrain to which they had to adapt themselves, by the time of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti there was a distinct cleavage between the two peoples. It was this split of which the Great Wall was a symbol, a cause and an effect.

Frontier states did indeed overlap the line of the Wall. For centuries at a time North China was ruled by the nomads. But they never succeeded in creating a successful compromise between the two contrasting and mutually distasteful ways of life, and in the end every such state had to choose between Chinese society, with its cities, roads and highly developed administration, its communal labour and intensive agriculture, and the pastoral life of the northern nomad, based on flocks and herds. Usually the trend was towards the south, and towards Chinese culture.

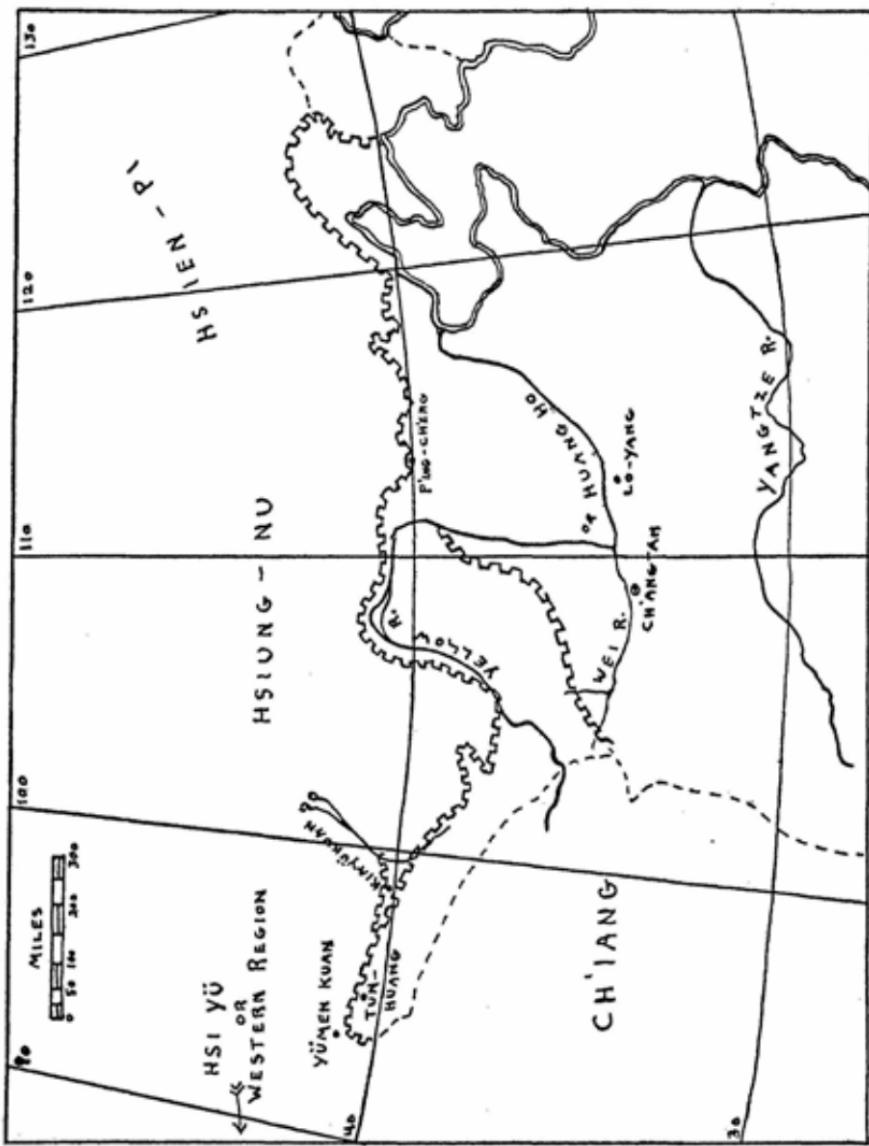
The northerners were by no means one people. They coalesced and dispersed, allied with and against each other, disappeared and reappeared under other names. The Jung and the Ti gave way to the Hsiung-nu. The Hsien-pi replaced the Hsiung-nu. (The latter, finding themselves superseded in Central Asia, apparently turned west and reappeared some centuries later as the Huns who ravaged Europe.) The Hsien-pi were followed by the Jou-jan, who in turn gave way to the Tu-chüeh, or Turks. Meanwhile the Yüeh-chih, the Wu-sun, the Ch'iang and half a dozen others occupied the western regions and the fringes of Tibet. The Mongols and the Manchus followed much later. But the difference between all these was never comparable to the difference between Chinese and non-Chinese.

The Chinese simply could not understand their neighbours. An ambassador who visited the court of the Hsiung-nu about 170 B.C. reported on their habits more in sorrow than in anger:

"The Huns are not more numerous than the population of a single Chinese province," he said. "What renders them intractable is that their habits and their diet are entirely different from those of the Han; they have no desire for our things. If only they acquired the taste, if they had only two-tenths of our needs, they would become our tributaries. But so far they have not. We have sent them silk costumes; they have worn them to shreds hunting in thickets and then declared that silk was not as good as their hides. We have sent them delicacies to eat; they have found them infinitely inferior to their milk and their koumiss. . . ."

Their way of fighting was equally irritating to the Chinese. After a period of ever-increasing raids and invasions by the Hsiung-nu, some Chinese emperor would decide to mount a major campaign and drive them back once and for all. With war chariots, a huge army, and supplies of grain sufficient for several months, he would advance north—only to find that he could travel a thousand miles without seeing a single enemy. As soon as he withdrew inside the Wall the raids would begin again. Again in 170 B.C., the Minister of War warned the Han Emperor Wēn Ti that ordinary methods of warfare would never defeat the barbarians.

"The Tartar method of making war is very different from ours," he pointed out with reluctant admiration. "Scaling and descending the most precipitous mountains with astonishing rapidity; swimming the deepest rivers and torrents; suffering wind, rain, hunger and thirst; making forced marches; not being halted even by precipices; accustoming their horses to pass along the narrowest tracks; expert with bow and arrow, and in surprise attacks; discharging their arrows even at full gallop; such are the Tartars. They attack,



THE WALL DURING THE HAN DYNASTY

retreat, and rally again . . . if they suffer a setback they simply disappear without trace, like a cloud."

The Minister's solution was to set up a buffer zone of Tartars who would be subject to the Chinese, and Wén Ti agreed. During his reign several barbarian tribes whose lands were contiguous to the Great Wall were subsidized and armed so that they should bear the brunt of attacks from the outer barbarians. The policy thus instituted of using border states as a defence against the turbulent tribes further north was one that the Chinese also adopted frequently in later centuries, not without success. But it was a dangerous, double-edged policy, dependent on a central government strong enough to control the frontier tribes; once these became too independent, or the Middle Kingdom too weak, the weapons that should have protected the Chinese were turned against them. The conquerors of China were far more likely to come from among the semi-civilized border states than from the outer barbarians of the steppes.

Wén Ti himself failed in his efforts. Large-scale invasions were renewed a few years later, reaching the very gates of Ch'ang-an in 158 B.C., and the Emperor's death in 157 B.C. was said to have been caused by grief and chagrin.

By the time of Wén Ti the Hsiung-nu were already a single although loosely united empire, incorporating the greater part of all the northern nomad tribes. Their rise to power had taken place somewhat earlier, coinciding roughly with that of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. Tumen (or Deuman, or T'ou-man), who was the first important chieftain of the Hsiung-nu, had been no match for the First Divine Emperor and his troops had not often infringed the line of the Great Wall, but his son Modun (or Mao-tun, or Mei Tei, or Baghdur) was one of the great legendary heroes of the north, comparable to Genghis Khan. Ruthless, cunning, a superlative horseman and leader, he was the terror of the first Han emperors and might well have overthrown the newly founded Han Dynasty had he cared to do so.

The manner of Modun's accession was hardly calculated to reassure his enemies. As a youth he had been sent by his father Tumen to the Yüeh-chih, a western tribe, as a hostage, because although he was the eldest son and heir presumptive Tumen apparently wished another of his sons to succeed him and had decided that this would be the easiest way to get rid of the heir. To make doubly sure Tumen then launched an attack on the Yüeh-chih, who would undoubtedly have murdered Modun there and then if he had not somehow succeeded in escaping in the midst of the confusion. He made his way safely back to the camp of the Hsiung-nu, where his father pretended to be delighted at his escape and granted him a bodyguard

of ten thousand mounted retainers, but it is unlikely that from then on either father or son had any illusions as to the feelings of the other.

Modun now selected a small body of bowmen as his constant companions, and among these few he insisted on immediate and unquestioning obedience to him. He kept in his quiver one particular arrow which had a whistle attached to it, and his orders were that whenever he fired this arrow every single archer must fire without hesitation at the same target, whether antelope or wolf or hare. Once his men were so accustomed to this idea that their arrows automatically followed his whistling arrow to whatever game Modun chose, he suddenly aimed it one day at his own favourite horse. Those who did not follow his example were put to death.

A few days later he despatched the whistling arrow into the heart of his favourite wife, and again the few incredulous bowmen who hesitated were immediately executed. His next target was his father Tumen's favourite horse, and by this time his men must have realized that whatever game he was playing was in deadly earnest and they took no chances; every arrow followed his. Such also seems to have been the case soon afterwards when he fired the whistling arrow at his father. His followers shot as he did, and responsibility for the death of the chieftain fell on the whole group.

Modun now assumed a title which was used by most of the Khans who succeeded him: *Shan-yü*, the last word of a phrase meaning Great Son of Heaven, or Heaven's Son Immense. Scarcely had he ascended the throne when the king of the Wu-huan, a tribe located east of the Hsiung-nu, apparently thinking that Modun's position as chieftain was still insecure, sent to demand a particular horse which had belonged to Tumen as tribute. The Hsiung-nu would have refused indignantly, but Modun said:

"What, would you quarrel with your neighbours for the sake of a horse?" and sent it to him.

Later the same king demanded one of Tumen's wives, and when his men besought him to fight rather than surrender her Modun refused. "Why, should we go to war for the sake of a woman?"

But when the king, finding him thus complaisant, began to encroach on Hsiung-nu territory Modun summoned his followers. "Now we have just cause to fight," he said, "for this land is the cradle of our kingdom, and not one inch shall belong to another."

Modun wasted little time in overthrowing the king of the Wu-huan, putting him and his entire family to death, and annexing their country. Then he turned west to conquer the kingdom of the Yüeh-chih, making a silver-inlaid drinking cup from the skull of their king. Next, retracing his steps, he occupied practically all of that territory inside the loop of the Yellow River from which Mēng

T'ien had driven the barbarians only twenty-five years before. His lands now marched along the whole of the northern frontier of China, and parts of the Great Wall, which had in recent years successfully restrained the lesser nomad tribes, were already in his hands.

In China Liu Pang, now become the Han Emperor Kao Tsu, had successfully reunited the empire under his rule and was ready to face this new Hsiung-nu menace. But he miscalculated. Spies sent to Modun's camp reported to him that the Tartar's troops consisted of badly equipped and dispirited men, while his horses seemed thin and undernourished; the spies had seen exactly what Modun intended them to see and had not discovered that there was a central enclosure, closely guarded, where he kept his fighting men and horses.

Liu Pang therefore set off confidently for the north with some two hundred and twenty thousand of his best men. So impatient was he to encounter the Shan-yü that when they drew near to the border-lands he himself pushed ahead to the city of P'ing Ch'êng (near Ta-tung, in modern Shensi), taking with him only a small advance guard.

This was what Modun had been hoping for. He swept down on the city with two hundred thousand horsemen and completely encircled it, stationing four separate armies—distinguished by their white, chestnut, grey and black horses—at the four points of the compass and making it utterly impossible for the imperial armies to break through their ranks. Liu Pang and his bodyguard were imprisoned there for over a week, short of food and unable to do more than defend the city walls, and they would undoubtedly have had to surrender except for a stratagem devised by one of the Han ministers, Ch'én P'ing, who was in the beleaguered city.

Exactly what Ch'én P'ing's plan was no one knows to this day, except that it depended on the jealousy of Modun's chief wife, who was in command of one of the four besieging armies. The popular belief is that Ch'én P'ing invented puppets, and that on the parapets of the city walls he displayed a number of realistic wooden figures of beautiful women, who moved and seemed even to be signalling to the enemy troops. The Tartar queen's fears for her husband's fidelity were aroused, and she allowed the Emperor to escape rather than have these beautiful rivals fall into Modun's hands.

Whatever the reason, the Hsiung-nu voluntarily withdrew and for the time being made no further attacks on Chinese territory. They carried off with them immense booty, livestock, grain and whatever else they could lay hands on in the neighbouring countryside. And it would seem that they had also secured a guarantee from

Liu Pang that he would not attempt to follow them when his main army rejoined him, if indeed he had ever considered doing so.

Liu Pang never forgot that first encounter with Modun. He never again made the mistake of under-estimating the Hsiung-nu; his policy thereafter was to keep them at a distance by treaties, gifts, and strengthening the frontier defences rather than by direct attack.

In spite of this unfortunate beginning the Han Dynasty subsequently saw China's furthest expansion, and it was under the Hans that intercourse between the peoples on either side of the Wall, peaceful and otherwise, was at its height. The pages of Chinese history are filled with the story of negotiations, alliances, trade, exchange of hostages, intrigue, defiance and war between the two. To a great extent they centre round the figure of Han Wu Ti, the romantic, extravagant Emperor, China's Louis XIV, who ascended the throne in 140 B.C. and whose reign of fifty-four years was both the longest and the most splendid of the Han Dynasty.

Han Wu Ti extended the Great Wall to the furthest point it was ever to reach, more than two hundred miles west of Chiayükuān, beyond Tun Huang and Yümen, and built a string of fortresses jutting out into Central Asia even beyond that. Ruins of Han watch-towers still stand in the remote deserts there. His objective was two-fold: to prevent the junction of the Hsiung-nu with the Ch'iang barbarians who occupied the borderlands of Tibet; and to establish contact, followed if possible by alliances and trade, with the independent kingdoms of Central Asia; and in both he succeeded. He also brought China into touch with the civilizations of the West.

Wu Ti was a romantic character, a prince of great spirit about whom many legends have gathered. He loved to go hunting in disguise, riding alone through the vast imperial parks in search of wild boar, bears, stags and lesser game, and it was only the protests of his horrified ministers that eventually persuaded him to accept an escort. But he had also a profound knowledge of government, and intense ambition, which combined to lead him into a policy of expansion and of imperial initiative. Like Shih Huang Ti, he exalted the throne and concentrated power in his own hands. Yet he was quick to use men of ability wherever he found them, and introduced competitive examinations in an effort to attract talent to court.

Again like Shih Huang Ti, he embarked on numerous public works in addition to the several hundred miles of Wall which were built during his reign. Canals were dredged, new roads laid out to the south and south-west, and irrigation ditches dug to curb the flooding of the Yellow River. He increased the standing army, and a galaxy of brilliant generals carried his arms north and west. The

Hsiung-nu continued to be troublesome off and on throughout the Han Dynasty, but the great striking force built up by Modun which at one time threatened the very existence of the Middle Kingdom was broken by Wu Ti.

To finance all this he increased taxes and imposed a government monopoly on salt, iron and fermented drinks. He also raised money by such dubious practices as selling titles and insisting that when the lords paid court to him they present their seals of office on a piece of skin, a foot square, made from the hide of a species of white deer found only in the imperial park; the deer-skin being sold to them at an exorbitant price. By establishing government control over the minting of coinage for the first time, instead of leaving it in the hands of various independent officials, he succeeded in maintaining the value of the currency. He also instituted a system whereby the state bought staples when they were cheap and placed them on the market when prices rose.

The Han Empire under Wu Ti was comparable with the contemporary Roman Empire. Outlying territories came under Chinese control for the first time. China's frontiers were extended not only north and north-west but far to the south, and in the north-east Wu Ti annexed Ch'aohsien, a state which at that time included north Korea and south Manchuria.

He was not modest about his achievements. During a tour of the Great Wall in 110 B.C. he sent envoys ahead with a message to the Khan of the Hsiung-nu:

"The Emperor my master has reduced all the peoples of the south to obedience; the heads of their princes are exposed at Ch'ang-an, in sight of all the world. Lest you think yourself strong enough to dispute such great power, the Emperor has come to visit his frontiers in person and is ready to receive you. If you are aware of any weakness in yourself, you must acknowledge him sovereign; otherwise be prepared for the effects of his wrath."

The Khan did not reply.

Yet despite hard-fought campaigns, Wu Ti's reign was for the most part peaceful. Trade with the West flourished as it had never done before, and has seldom done since. Ambassadors from strange and remote kingdoms appeared at the Han court, bringing with them foreign luxuries and curiosities as well as romantic stories of the other lands that lay beyond the mountains, and carrying Chinese silks back to their own countries. At first the merchandise carried by these travellers was intended only as gifts for the Emperor, but the Emperor would often distribute the less valuable objects among the members of his court, the ambassadors themselves soon fell into the habit of selling some of their "gifts", and the taste for foreign

articles grew. Soon travelling merchants, still calling themselves ambassadors, carried on a regular trade between Ch'ang-an and the West.

Thus the Chinese received ivory, glass, jade—which they already valued highly but which was not found in China proper—tortoise shell, diamonds and other precious stones, and at a slightly later date wool, linen and asbestos. An embassy from Parthia brought ostrich eggs and jugglers, whose short, curly-headed figures are easily recognized among the figurines unearthed from Han tombs. In return the Chinese sent skins and furs which they had obtained from the north, iron, cinnamon, rhubarb,<sup>1</sup> and above all silk; there was an insatiable demand for silk thread and woven silk, both unknown abroad.

Wu Ti shared Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's weakness for Taoist superstitions, especially the belief in immortality. He constantly sought the advice of Taoist magicians and alchemists, and swallowed innumerable potions guaranteed to ensure eternal life. Once one of his ministers who happened to be present when the Emperor was about to drink one of these mysterious concoctions seized the cup and downed its contents before Wu Ti could do so. Furious, the Emperor ordered his immediate execution.

"But you cannot kill me," the minister pointed out; "I have just rendered myself immortal. Or, if it is still possible for me to die, then Your Majesty should reward me, since I have proved to you that this liquor is not what it is claimed to be." (A later emperor, Toba Kuei of the Wei Dynasty, gave the elixir of life which had been prepared for him to a condemned criminal and when the man proved no more difficult than any other to execute, decided against trying it.)

Wu Ti in this case admitted his error, but he did not give up the search for immortality. He was so certain that the elixir of immortality existed that when the famous mystic Huai Nan-tzu died the Emperor believed that he must have discovered the formula at last, and having drunk the magic brew had ascended straight to Heaven. Eye-witnesses indeed assured him that Huai Nan-tzu had risen bodily up to the sky in broad daylight, followed by his dogs and his chickens, all of whom had also become immortal after lapping up the dregs of the elixir which had fallen to the ground.

Han Wu Ti's policy of strength, and his success in playing off one Tartar chieftain against another, laid the foundation for a consider-

<sup>1</sup> Rhubarb remained a Chinese export until the nineteenth century. Arthur Waley has recently pointed out that during the Opium War the Chinese believed that if they refused to export rhubarb to England constipation would force the British to come to terms.

able period of peace. Raids and skirmishes were inevitable, but the leaders on both sides of the Great Wall appreciated the strength of their enemy, and preferred alliance to an inconclusive struggle. The Wall itself played a great part in keeping this peace, and was recognized by Chinese and Hsiung-nu alike as the line of demarcation.

After Wu Ti's death Chinese influence over the kingdoms of Central Asia weakened, and trade with the West fluctuated according to the policies of succeeding emperors. The more economical rulers were inclined to frown upon the import of what they considered frivolous luxuries. When envoys from Chi-pin, near Kashmir, one of the few kingdoms in the Western Region which Wu Ti had not succeeded in bringing under Chinese control, arrived at the court of Han Yüan Ti (48-32 B.C.) and offered to acknowledge the sovereignty of China the Emperor received them courteously but flatly refused to consider their offer. A second embassy met with the same reception from his son, Han Ch'eng Ti.

"The difficulties of the road, the dangers to which it is exposed, should dismiss all idea of commerce with the Chi-pin," a minister familiar with the Western Region pointed out, in words which would have horrified Han Wu Ti and his adventurous captains. "Besides such commerce would be of no use to our empire, since it would be confined to trade carried on by common merchants, who would be thinking only of their own advantage.

"If we refuse their offer of submission, moreover, they will have to protect themselves against their own neighbours without expecting help from us, and will be less likely to think of waging war elsewhere."

Some emperors were so economical, or so short of cash, that they even objected to the lavish receptions which were traditionally provided for Hsiung-nu Khans when they crossed the Great Wall to pay an official visit to their imperial neighbours. But the importance of keeping on good terms with the barbarians usually outweighed the emptiness of the treasury, especially when it was realized that any affront to the Hsiung-nu might lead to renewed warfare.

"We all know that even Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, one of the most powerful princes who has occupied the throne, and General Meng T'ien, the greatest soldier of his time, never managed to reduce the Tartars," one of the Censors observed in 2 B.C. when there was some question of refusing to receive a state visit from the chief of the Hsiung-nu. "This same prince thought to stop their frequent raids into our lands by constructing the Great Wall, an insufficient barrier against their incursions, which continued as before.

"Han Kao Tsu, founder of our august dynasty, was blockaded by them in P'ing Ch'eng, and only escaped from their hands by a



Chiayükuan, the furthest outpost of the Great Wall in the west



The country beyond the western end of the Great Wall



An outer watch-tower of the Great Wall

ruse. . . . It was only after Han Wu Ti had pursued them again and again into their own deserts, and defeated them in many costly encounters, that they began to ask for peace.

"The Tartars are naturally belligerent, robust and not easily exhausted. The evil they have done us, the disastrous wars we have had against them, should make us at all costs avoid finding ourselves again at odds with them. The expense of receiving their Shan-yü, can it be compared with the losses we would suffer if they became our enemies again?"

The balance of power between the rival empires was disturbed when Wang Mang usurped the throne of the Hans. The Hsiung-nu then took advantage of China's internal troubles to invade the north, and although Wang Mang was well aware of the importance of the northern and north-western frontiers, and had himself carried out two campaigns in the Western Region, he was not strong enough either to drive the Tartars back or to hold the defences in the north-west against them. Chinese outposts there were gradually abandoned and Chinese influence in Central Asia receded.

Wang Mang was overthrown in A.D. 23 and the Hans returned to the throne to rule for another two hundred years. But the great days of Han Wu Ti were never repeated. The capital was moved from Ch'ang-an eastward to Loyang, a change which almost invariably coincided with weakness on the part of the central government, and the restored dynasty was thereafter known as the Eastern, or Later Han. The line of the Wall nevertheless remained roughly the line of the frontier, for now the power of the Hsiung-nu was also on the wane and pressure was relaxed. Soon both Han and Hun were to disappear, the Han to dissolve into warring kingdoms, the Hsiung-nu to give way to the Hsien-pi Tartars.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CHAO CHŪN

"Death would have ravished her some hapless day  
Even among the palaces of Han,  
But she was never born to taste  
The bitterness of fate so far away. . . ."

*"The Tomb of Chao Chün", by CH'ANG CH'IEN  
Translated by L. CRANMER-BYNG*

DURING THE Han Dynasty it became customary for a Chinese princess to be presented to the Khan of the Hsiung-nu as his wife. The pattern was set by Liu Pang soon after his unfortunate experience at P'ing Ch'êng had convinced him that for the time being at least the Chinese must keep on good terms with their enemy.

"The empire is scarcely pacified," the Emperor's advisers warned him then. "It is impossible to reduce the Huns by force; useless to speak of humanity or reason to this Modun, who has murdered his father, who has married his mother, and who values nothing but brute force. Let us think of the future. Let us try to place our descendants in our debt. If you will offer your daughter in marriage to Modun, he will undoubtedly make her his queen, and if she has a son that son will become heir. Thus as long as Modun lives he will be your son-in-law, and after his death your grandson will become Khan of the Hsiung-nu. Thus, without fighting, they will come under our influence."

This prospect was a little over-optimistic. The Emperor nevertheless agreed, and would have sent his eldest daughter to the Hsiung-nu had not the girl's mother protested that it was quite unnecessary to make such a sacrifice. Any other girl of noble birth would do as well, so long as Modun believed her to be the daughter of the Emperor. Liu Pang accordingly chose one of the least attractive imperial princesses and represented her to the Shan-yü as his own daughter; rightly or wrongly, Modun's descendants thereafter claimed kinship with the founder of the Han Dynasty.

The custom being thus inaugurated, no treaty of friendship was considered complete unless it included a Chinese princess for the ruling Khan. Modun's son, who succeeded him in 174 B.C., received a princess when he renewed the treaty of alliance which his father had made with China. Again in 151 B.C., in 81 B.C. and on numerous other occasions princesses were sent to the Hsiung-nu court. Nor

were such gifts confined to the Hsiung-nu; before long the Wu-sun, the Yüeh-chih and other western kingdoms were all demanding Chinese princesses for their rulers.

Voices were occasionally raised to protest at the unhappy fate of these princesses. It was pointed out that it was most unlikely that any Chinese heir would ever be allowed to inherit the Hsiung-nu throne, and that meanwhile the poor princesses, sacrificed to policy, were condemned to a life of misery among the barbarians. But as long as their exile helped to keep the peace, there was no choice.

"The Hsiung-nu are like birds which rise in flocks, now on one side, now on another; the moment you think you can contain them, they disappear on wings. Always wandering, shifting, defended by their mountains; always able to take us by surprise. It is impossible to conquer them. Therefore they must not turn against us."

So ran the argument. The hapless princesses and their escorts continued to travel north into the wilderness. One among them, Chao Chün, has become a favourite heroine of Chinese legend, both because of the strange incident which reputedly led to her being chosen as the bride of the Hsiung-nu chieftain Khujanga, and because Khujanga himself was the first of the Huns to accept Chinese sovereignty. Poets have told her story again and again. And as late as the ninth century A.D., Po Chu-I, travelling in a district where women tattooed their faces, was told that this was where Chao Chün was born and that ever since her day the women there had disfigured themselves lest their beauty lead them to follow in her footsteps.

Chao Chün was born in a village on the banks of the Yangtze, in modern Hupei, the daughter of a government official. Like every heroine of Chinese romance she was exceedingly beautiful, with wide-set eyes, slender eyebrows and a delicate mouth, an oval face, a graceful figure and tiny feet. She also seems to have been high-spirited and of an independent character.

The Emperor at that time was Yüan Ti, great-great-grandson of Wu Ti, who had come to the throne in 48 B.C. at the age of twenty-seven. He was a man of austere tastes, interested mainly in the study of history, music and painting. After his father died he had followed both custom and his father's wishes by sending all the late emperor's concubines back to their own homes. Following his own inclination, he had not bothered to replace them. The Inner Courts, which ever since the days of Wu Ti had been filled by hundreds if not thousands of beautiful women, their slaves, their eunuchs and their entertainers, remained empty.

After a few years, however, either on his own initiative or because the Censors warned him that such drastic economy at the court was causing great hardship among the artisans and merchants of the

capital, the Emperor relented. A romantic detail probably added to the story much later was that he dreamed one night of a particularly lovely girl, and was determined to find out whether she actually existed in the flesh. In any case, whatever the reason for his change of heart, Yüan Ti now announced that five hundred concubines to occupy the Inner Courts should be chosen immediately from among the most eligible maidens in the Middle Kingdom, and he entrusted the choice of the five hundred to one Mao Yen-shou, whom he named Administrator of the Inner Courts. Mao Yen-shou was a talented artist with a great love of beauty; unfortunately he was also corrupt, avaricious and unscrupulous.

Chao Chün was among the five hundred chosen. Her father presented the Minister of Selection Mao Yen-shou with the gift customary on such occasions, twenty rolls of silk and two hundred ounces of gold, and Chao Chün set off on the month-long journey to the capital.

By this time the Inner Courts had been restored to something of their former splendour. Once again they had become a small, unique world of their own, a world of intrigue, isolation and extravagance, existing only to display the beauty of its inhabitants to the best advantage and to keep them amused. Imperial barges now made their way along the network of canals which led from every part of the country to the capital at Ch'ang-an, bringing brocades and silks and mother-of-pearl and jade for the newly appointed concubines to wear, oranges, melons and litchis for their table, camphor for the chests in which they were to store their robes. A female orchestra, including flutes, drums and stringed instruments, provided music for the ladies' court. Long-tailed birds and exotic plants were imported to brighten their gardens, and the whole of the Forbidden City was transformed.

Yüan Ti however had not changed. He took little if any interest in his new concubines. He was in fact so overcome at the thought of seeing five hundred girls, all beautiful and all intent on winning his favours, that he finally commissioned Mao Yen-shou to paint a portrait of each of the five hundred. Thus, he thought, he could choose a few among them without having to see them all for himself.

It was a task for which Mao Yen-shou, a quick, accurate painter, was well suited. Moreover it offered a perfect opportunity for graft, for although he did nothing so indiscreet as to demand money he made it clear to each sitter that the degree to which he accentuated her good points would depend on the value of the gifts he received. Only two or three of the girls, Chao Chün among them, indignantly refused either to give him anything or to promise him any future benefits if they should be chosen by the Emperor. Chao Chün in

particular incurred his wrath by pointing out that her father had already given him all that he was entitled to, and adding primly that she would not wish the Emperor to believe her more beautiful than she actually was.

Mao Yen-shou took his revenge by slightly distorting Chao Chün's features, the result being a fair likeness and yet the picture of a remarkably plain girl. To make doubly sure that Yüan Ti would not ask to see her, he added a black mole under her right eye, a mole in that position being believed to bring misfortune to anyone who came in contact with a woman so disfigured.

Yüan Ti noticed the mole and commented that Mao Yen-shou should never have chosen such a girl, but the painter explained that she must have succeeded in concealing it when he first saw her. He added that it might be wise to have Chao Chün removed from the Inner Courts to the Cold Palace, an isolated pavilion unconnected with the rest of the ladies' apartments, where the Son of Heaven's eye could not even inadvertently fall upon her, and this was done.

Meanwhile the fortunes of the Hsiung-nu had greatly declined since the death of Modun. Due in part to skilful diplomacy and intrigue by the Chinese, there were two rival claimants to the Hsiung-nu throne and one of these, Hu-han-hsieh (or Khujanga, the title by which he was known after he became Shan-yü) had now acknowledged Chinese sovereignty in return for Chinese help against his enemies. He did so reluctantly, and against the opposition of his advisers, and in so doing he put an end to the independence of the Hsiung-nu, but he also put an end to the struggle for the Hsiung-nu throne, and temporarily at least established peace along the frontiers of China.

Khujanga was received with great honour when he first visited the court of Yüan Ti's father, Hsüan Ti, in 51 B.C. to declare his allegiance to the Chinese. Two thousand imperial cavalry escorted him from the Great Wall to the capital, and the Emperor himself met him outside Ch'ang-an at the bridge across the Wei, where the two rulers greeted each other amid tumultuous shouts of "Wan Sui!"—"Live Ten Thousand Years!"—from the people. Except for the formal ceremony when he knelt and swore homage to the Emperor, he was treated as an equal.

When Yüan Ti succeeded to the throne he and Khujanga exchanged gifts and concluded a non-aggression pact, sealed by the sacrifice of a white horse, and by a ceremony at which representatives of the two sovereigns drank mixed wine and horse's blood from the famous goblet made out of the skull of the Yüeh-chih chief-tain whom Modun had conquered years before. Over this they swore that "Peace shall forever be maintained between the Celestial

Kingdom and the Hsiung-nu". But it was not until 33 B.C., fifteen years after Yüan Ti's accession, that Khujanga again visited the Chinese court in person.

He brought gifts of sable and fox skins, a hundred highland-bred horses and a string of camels laden with precious metals. In return Yüan Ti presented him with brocaded robes, unspun silk for use in padded clothing, and other luxuries unknown in the north. The peace treaty was reaffirmed. Only one other token was needed to cement the alliance between the two empires after Khujanga had left Ch'ang-an, and that was the traditional gift of a Chinese princess to be the wife of the Khan. Khujanga, with his admiration for the court and customs of the Middle Kingdom, attached particular importance to this final proof of friendship.

When choosing a girl to be presented to the Khan it was natural for Yüan Ti to turn to the portraits painted by Mao Yen-shou, and to choose the least attractive among them. Chao Chün was therefore selected as Khujanga's bride, received the title of princess, and was summoned from the Cold Palace to the throne room to say farewell to the Emperor whom she had never yet seen and to be formally presented to the Hsiung-nu ambassadors. Mao Yen-shou was apparently absent from the court when this decision was taken; otherwise he would probably have found some means of preventing the audience.

Yüan Ti was expecting to see an ill-favoured girl with a mole under one eye. He may even have wondered whether she was so plain that the Hsiung-nu would refuse to accept her. He was thus completely unprepared for the radiantly beautiful Chao Chün, wearing a dress of pearl-embroidered brocade, her unblemished features surmounted by a headdress of pearls and kingfisher feathers, with a fringe of pearls across her forehead.

Legend tells how he recognized in her the girl of whom he had dreamed many years before, and how he turned to the Hsiung-nu ambassadors and explained that there had been a mistake and that this was not the promised princess. But the Hsiung-nu, having overcome their own surprise, were now convinced that if Yüan Ti had been willing to part with so beautiful a princess he must either hold his allies in great esteem, or fear them, and they replied firmly that whether or not Chao Chün were the princess originally chosen they would accept no other. The more they realized that the Emperor was unwilling to let her go, the more adamant they became.

At last, rather than risk breaking the peace treaty, Yüan Ti agreed to carry out his promise. He consoled himself by having Mao Yen-shou executed, and his head displayed over the city gate, a fate reserved for major criminals, but it was slight consolation.

Meanwhile Chao Chün set off on her long journey to the court of the Shan-yü. She travelled as far as the Great Wall in an imperial chariot, with a mounted escort, her own servants and a band of musicians to cheer her on her journey. The court observed the same period of mourning after her departure that they would have done on the death of an imperial favourite. There in Ch'ang-an, amidst all the luxury and beauty, the delights of civilization, it must indeed have seemed as though she had gone to her death. She had gone from the only world known to the imperial ladies and the courtiers, from the gaiety of the Inner Courts, to a wilderness where even the Khan lived in a tent and where there were neither palaces, nor courtyards, nor gardens.

According to the more romantic poets Chao Chün threw herself into the Yellow River at the pass where the river and the Great Wall meet, rather than cross the Wall and leave her native land for the wild north. The grass along the river there, they say, is greener than anywhere else because of the tears she shed before she died, and the River is called River of the Princess because of her. The graves of those who are buried abroad are still sometimes called "green tombs of exile", referring to the everlastingly green grass that grows above her supposed tomb.

But Chao Chün did not die beside the Wall. Her caravan halted there for a few days while she rested, bade farewell to her Chinese escort, and wrote a final message to Yüan Ti. Then she changed from her carriage to a Mongol-style chariot drawn by camels, although she also had her own horse to ride when the weather was good. She wore a long travelling cape of satin lined with fox fur, with a hood of the same material. Paintings of "The Princess Chao crossing the Border" usually show her riding, followed by two ladies-in-waiting, with Hsiung-nu musicians and an armed escort, carts, camels and horses in the background.

It was another three months' journey from the Wall to the court of Khujanga. Three months across desolate country, treeless, arid and largely uninhabited. Chao Chün travelled in autumn or early winter, and it must have been a strange and lonely journey for her, although the hardships of the road were probably somewhat exaggerated by the poet Po Chu-I when he wrote:

"Full in her face, the desert sand; full in her hair, the wind.

Her pencilled brows have lost their black, the rouge has  
melted from her cheek.

Grief and pain and bitter toil have left so deep a mark  
That now in the end she is very like what the painter made her  
in his picture . . ."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Arthur Waley.

The court of the Hsiung-nu, although it did consist almost entirely of tents, was by no means as primitive as the Chinese in their superiority imagined. Most of the tents were permanent or semi-permanent and those of the Khan and his family were palatial in size, richly furnished with carpets, lacquer chests, furs and piles of silk and brocaded cushions imported from the Middle Kingdom. Yet life there undoubtedly was in sharp contrast to that of the Chinese capital.

The Hsiung-nu lived in the saddle, hunting or fighting, hardened by a climate of extremes in which only a robust people could survive. "Their native country," so it was said, "was the back of a horse." They wore rough clothes, and their food was certainly coarse by Chinese standards; mutton, goats' cheese, mares' milk, and tea made from pressed bricks of inferior tea-leaves stewed for several hours did not compare with the varied and delicately flavoured dishes of the Han court and their pale, fragrant tea. Moreover the nomads' only fuel was dung, whether of sheep, camels or horses, with a sharp although not altogether unpleasant odour.

Chao Chün seems to have adapted herself to this new and different world. The Chinese poets (those who do not believe that she threw herself into the river rather than cross the Great Wall) would have it that she thought of nothing but the palaces and courts of Ch'ang-an, and sighed out her longing for her homeland in mournful verses, letters, and songs which she accompanied upon her lute. Although her gentle influence softened the heart of the Khan, they say, and thus helped maintain the peace that China needed, she was never reconciled to her unhappy fate. In fact it is more likely that, young and spirited as she was, she thoroughly enjoyed her life.

Although Khujanga already had several wives, and grown sons, she was immediately proclaimed chief consort with the title, "The Queen who brings peace to the Hsiung-nu". The Khan was so delighted that soon after her arrival he wrote to Yüan Ti suggesting that, since their two peoples were now allied forever, he would be responsible for the defence of the Great Wall and the Chinese frontier from the Yellow River as far west as Tun Huang, thus removing the burden of its support from the Chinese people. Surprisingly, in view of the mistrust and constant enmity between Chinese and barbarians, Yüan Ti and his councillors seriously considered this proposal. Only the warnings of one aged Censor, old enough to remember many intrigues on the part of the Hsiung-nu, dissuaded them.

"It is now over a century since the Great Wall was rebuilt by Wu Ti," he said. "It is not by any means a mere mud rampart. Up hill and down, it follows the natural configuration of the ground, is honeycombed with secret passages, and bristles with fortified points.

Is all this vast labour to be allowed to go to rack and ruin? The more we dispense with our own defences, the more we shall be beholden to the Shan-yü, whose pretensions will advance in proportion. . . .”

Yüan Ti therefore returned a tactful answer, refusing the offer on somewhat unexpected grounds. “Know then that the Great Wall was not built so much to protect the Empire against the outer world, as to protect the outer world against the over-enterprising Chinese. . . .”

Khujanga died in 31 B.C., only two years after Chao Chün became queen. The Emperor Yüan Ti had died a year earlier. It was customary among the Hsiung-nu for a new Khan to marry the wives of his predecessor, with the exception only of his own mother, and Chao Chün now wrote to the new Chinese Emperor to ask whether she should agree to marry Khujanga’s son and heir, Vughturoi. The Son of Heaven replied yes, she must follow the national custom wherever she might be; and indeed she seems to have been not unwilling. Thus she became also Vughturoi’s chief wife, and remained Queen of the Hsiung-nu until 20 B.C. In those years she is believed to have exercised considerable influence over Tartar policy, especially the maintenance of friendly relations with China.

Vughturoi died suddenly in 20 B.C. and Chao Chün, aged thirty-three, was left a widow for the second time, with a son by Khujanga and two daughters by her second husband. Her ultimate fate is uncertain. Some say that she herself died within a few years, and that her son was murdered much later by a new Khan who saw in him a potential rival, others that she and her son were both murdered by the Khan in A.D. 18; others that she died of grief when her son was killed. She never crossed the Wall again into her native land; it does not seem that she made any great effort to do so.

But romance will have the last word. It is said that before she died she asked to be buried on the borders of China, and that her body was carried in state to a spot a few miles south of modern Kueisui, near the curve of the Yellow River. There she was laid to rest, and an immense mound of earth erected over her grave. The mound indeed still stands, a low, artificial hill from which one can look far south across the fertile plains of the Middle Kingdom, or north to the mountains that mark the beginning of the Mongolian plateau. It is still called the Tomb or the Flower Garden of Chao Chün. And although it is unlikely that it originally had anything to do with the Queen of the Hsiung-nu it is an appropriate memorial not only to her but to innumerable other princesses who made the same long journey into exile to help preserve an uneasy peace between the northern and southern empires.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE WESTERN REGION

THE GREAT WALL not only drew a line between the north and the south. It led the way into Central Asia. Its western fortresses were like a signpost pointing across the wilderness to oases such as Hami and Turfan and beyond them to the great mountains that divided Asia from the west, pointing the way to those lands which the Chinese called Hsi Yü, or the Western Region. The Chinese armies that from time to time extended Chinese sovereignty over that region set forth from the Wall, and fell back on the Wall when their campaigns were unsuccessful. The caravans of silk, the traders, the ambassadors, the explorers who reached the shores of the Caspian nearly two thousand years ago, the pilgrims travelling to India in search of a new religion, all followed the Wall as long as they could before striking out across the western desert.

From very early times the long, narrow panhandle through which the western section of the Wall runs was a strip of Chinese territory projecting into alien lands. It served the double purpose of preventing a union between the northern and the western "barbarians", and of enabling China to keep in touch with the kingdoms of the Western Region. The Chinese attitude towards these, although undoubtedly one of superiority, was quite different to her attitude towards the Hsiung-nu and other northern tribes. The northerners were uncouth, troublesome neighbours, always too close for comfort, who were likely to harass or invade the Middle Kingdom whenever it suited them. The Western Kingdoms were distant strangers with whom it was desirable to keep on good terms, who could often be brought under Chinese influence, and would sometimes voluntarily accept Chinese sovereignty.

Traditionally the first Chinese to explore Central Asia was the Emperor Mu Wang, who came to the throne of the Chou Dynasty about 1000 B.C. He is reputed to have been a shrewd, capable ruler whose only failing was an insatiable love of travel and adventure, and of riding in magnificent chariots drawn by the finest horses in the kingdom. Legend and myth have embroidered his journeys, but it seems quite possible that he did travel beyond the confines of China as it then was, and may even have reached the Tarim Basin.

Soon after his accession to the throne a nobleman named Tsao Fu who shared the king's tastes, and who was himself a skilled

charioteer, presented Mu Wang with eight exceptionally swift and beautiful horses, offering his own services as driver. Thereafter the eight famous horses—now familiar to any collector of Chinese ivory, jade or porcelain—carried Tsao Fu and his master “wherever wheel-ruts run and the hoofs of horses had trodden”.

Hearing that a country where numerous rare and wild beasts were to be found lay west of China, near the source of the Han River, the Emperor ordered Tsao Fu to conduct him there in the thirteenth year of his reign. He so enjoyed this excursion that a few years later he set forth again and, having first defeated the Jung barbarians, pushed on further west into what can only have been some part of Central Asia. He is said to have reached a pleasant country, fertile and watered by abundant springs, where he was received and entertained by the King of the West. During a farewell feast held in his honour, this monarch composed a mournful song of parting:

“The white clouds lift from the mountains and climb towards the sky. Your road will be long, beset by mountains and rivers. Before your death, will you ever return to us?”

And Mu Wang replied in the same strain, “Alas, I must travel east to restore peace in China. When that is done I will return to you—within three years, I hope.”

Yet as he took the long road towards home it is said that the Emperor sighed to himself, thinking of how much time he had spent away from his own court. “Alas,” he said to Tsao Fu, “I am less inclined to virtue than to pleasure. I fear that posterity will record only my faults!”

On his return he settled vast estates upon his faithful charioteer, who thus became the ancestor of the Marquises of Chao, one of the Contending States of later years. At least, that is the more likely of the two versions of Tsao Fu’s fate; the other has him transplanted to Heaven as the constellation Cepheus.

For some years then Mu Wang remained in his capital and attended to the more prosaic business of government. But his wanderlust was still strong and when, some years later, the Jung ceased to pay him their usual tribute he was delighted to find an excuse for further adventures. In spite of strong opposition from his family and his Censors, who pointed out that if the Son of Heaven were sufficiently virtuous his enemies would undoubtedly submit of their own accord, he gathered together a great army and set forth to chastize the Jung. The latter, hearing that this formidable expedition was approaching their lands, simply retired south-west and left the country behind them completely deserted. Mu Wang returned from his venture with four wolves and four stags, the only living creatures

he had encountered, and the Censors were rude enough to comment that he really did not need so many men to capture a few wild beasts.

Mu Wang died about 947 B.C., reputedly aged a hundred and four. He was the first of many rulers to be fascinated by the lands of the west. And the Chinese have never wearied of weaving legends around his name, until the whole of his western journey was transformed into a visit to the fairy Hsi Wang Mu, Queen of the Western Paradise, in her enchanted palace on Mount K'uen Lun, where he tasted the peaches of immortality and whiled away, not years but centuries in feasting and revelry.

The Emperor who inherited most of Mu Wang's preoccupation with the Western Region was Han Wu Ti. We have already seen that he extended the Great Wall to the furthest point it ever reached, and drove a line of fortresses still further west into the desert beyond. But Wu Ti himself was too busy with problems of government, administration and internal reform to spend much time away from his capital in travel or conquest. It was his generals and statesmen, especially Chang Ch'ien, who carried on the legendary explorations of Mu Wang and opened up the west to China. To Chang Ch'ien belongs the credit for pioneering those overland trade routes across the wilderness of desert and mountain by means of which Occident and Orient have communicated ever since.

It was about 165 B.C. that the Hsiung-nu conqueror, Modun, having inflicted a crushing defeat on the Yüeh-chih tribes, used the skull of their king to make himself a drinking cup. This was common practice among the Huns but it seems to have been the last straw as far as the Yüeh-chih were concerned, and rather than remain subject to a people with such revolting habits their main horde migrated westward in search of a new home. Despite their defeat they were still formidable fighters; during their march they invaded the territory of the Wu-sun and other western tribes, and eventually pushed further west and conquered Sogdiana and Bactria.

When the news of this great trek reached Han Wu Ti he professed himself deeply touched by the fate of these unhappy people who had been driven from their native lands by the barbarians. His solicitude was perhaps not unaffected by the thought that any enemy of the Hsiung-nu would be a useful ally to China. If he could get in touch with the Yüeh-chih and form an alliance with them it would help him in holding that wedge between the horse-riding Hsiung-nu of the north and the sheep-driving nomads of the west, "cutting off the Tartar's right arm", which was always one of his main objectives. It was not yet known however where the fugitive tribe had

settled, and in 138 B.C. Chang Ch'ien volunteered to lead a small expedition west in search of them.

The entire party, some hundred men in all, was promptly captured by the Hsiung-nu and held prisoner for ten years. At the end of that time Chang Ch'ien and a number of his comrades made their escape and pressed on westward to the kingdom of Ta Yüan, or Ferghana, in Russian Turkestan. There they found guides to conduct them to the lands north of the Oxus where the Yüeh-chih had finally made their home.

The rulers of the newly transplanted kingdom welcomed Chang Ch'ien's expedition and entertained them as their guests for over a year, during which time the travellers studied the customs and the geography of the Yüeh-chih and neighbouring states, but they firmly refused to consider either an alliance or any suggestion of fighting their way back to their native lands. This new homeland of theirs, they pointed out, was safe from attacks by the Hsiung-nu. Its soil was fertile and well-watered, and they lived in peace and prosperity. Why should they sacrifice this new-found security for the sake of revenge?

On his way back to China Chang Ch'ien was once again captured by the Hsiung-nu. This time he managed to escape within a year, but by the time he reached Ch'ang-an in 126 B.C. he had been thirteen years on the journey. Only two of his hundred companions returned with him.

Before Chang Ch'ien's expedition Central Asia had been virtually unknown to the Chinese. Now he brought back detailed descriptions of the various kingdoms located there. He told how the people of Ta Yüan lived in cities and villages and cultivated the earth even as the Chinese did, while the Yüeh-chih, the Wu-sun, the K'ang-chu and others migrated with their flocks to new pastures every year in the nomad way. He brought back plants foreign to China, the walnut, alfalfa, hemp and the cultivated grape, and is said to have taught his countrymen the art of making wine, which he had learned from the Persians. It was his account of these far countries, their peoples and their produce, that inspired Wu Ti to establish relations with the kingdoms of the Hsi Yü, and even with lands beyond the Pamirs.

Chang Ch'ien himself made other journeys. He travelled to the courts of the Wu-sun, carrying gifts of gold, silver and silk, to try and persuade them that it was to their advantage to acknowledge Chinese sovereignty, and, although he was no more successful with them than he had been with the Yüeh-chih, other members of his expedition took advantage of his stay with the Wu-sun to explore hitherto unknown regions nearby. Later he made an unsuccessful

attempt to reach the Western Region by a more southerly route which would have avoided the risk of running into the Hsiung-nu.

So much is fact. According to legend Chang Ch'ien also followed the twisted, turbulent Yellow River all the way to its source and confirmed what the Chinese had always believed, that that great river stemmed directly from the River of Heaven, or the Milky Way. Indeed he supposedly found himself sailing along the Milky Way without at first realizing where he was, and passed between the stars Vega and Altair.

Relations with the Western Kingdoms were generally more peaceful than with the Tartars. But in the years from 104 to 100 B.C., Han Wu Ti mounted two campaigns west of the Great Wall for a curious reason, that is, to procure for himself horses of a rare breed only to be found in Ta Yüan, or Ferghana. Wu Ti probably first heard about these steeds, which he called the Heavenly Horses, from Chang Ch'ien when the latter returned from his expedition to the west; they were reputed to sweat blood, to cover three hundred miles a day, and to gallop unharmed across any sort of country, however rough or stony. Nor were these qualities altogether mythical. Modern travellers have confirmed that the horses of that region do "sweat" blood, a peculiar characteristic due to the action of a tiny parasite, and as for treading rough ground they were presumably mountain-bred horses, hardened to rock and stone and much less likely to injure their hooves than the horses of the plain at a time when horses' hooves were shod, if at all, only with straw or leather.

Wu Ti made numerous efforts to secure these exceptional horses from Ta Yüan, without success. The King of Ta Yüan refused to part with any of them at any price. At last Wu Ti sent a formal embassy, carrying a thousand ounces of gold and the golden statue of a horse, to demand that the King of Ta Yüan surrender a few of the horses in exchange for these gifts. Although politely worded, his demand was clearly an ultimatum. But the King's only reply was to announce that if any of his subjects allowed so much as a single horse to fall into the hands of the Chinese they would be liable to death.

Hearing this, the Chinese envoy was so angry that he hammered the golden horse into a shapeless mass and stalked out of the throne room, only to be ambushed and murdered on his way back to China. Or at least that is one version of the incident. According to another he did secure several horses by bribery and escaped from the capital with them, whereupon the infuriated King sent troops to recover the animals, by force if necessary, and the over-zealous soldiers not only seized the horses but massacred the Chinese ambassador and his entire party as well.

Han Wu Ti was all the more determined to have his horses. But he under-estimated the strength of Ta Yüan. The first army he sent against them in 103 B.C., commanded by Li Kuang-li, consisted largely of undisciplined youths more interested in seeing the world than in fighting and they were easily defeated by the armies of Ta Yüan. Li Kuang-li, unable either to feed or to control his soldiers, took refuge outside the western fortress of the Wall at Yümen and appealed to the Emperor for leave to resign his command and withdraw. Wu Ti, however, was so furious at his failure to obtain the Heavenly Horses, and now the collapse of his army, that he sent word to the governor of Yümen that if Li Kuang-li or any one of the defeated army attempted to cross the Wall into China they should be executed on the spot.

Next year he relented sufficiently to send Li Kuang-li a second, more experienced army, and adequate provisions. Marching west again, Li successfully besieged the capital of Ta Yüan, and after a protracted struggle its people implored their King to yield and to let the Chinese have the horses they wanted. Why, they protested, should their country be laid waste and their cities destroyed for the sake of a few horses? But the King still refused. His horses were more precious to him than his life or his country. In desperation the army finally rebelled, cut off their ruler's head and sent it to Li Kuang-li with an offer to supply him with any number of Heavenly Horses if he would lift the siege and make peace on favourable terms; otherwise they would kill every horse, and die in the ruins of their city.

Since the horses were the sole object of the war, Li Kuang-li agreed with alacrity. He chose some thirty Heavenly Horses, and three thousand of inferior quality, the latter probably not unlike ordinary Chinese horses, and despatched them at once to the Emperor. Delighted, Wu Ti composed in his own handwriting a hymn of praise and welcome to the horses.

It seems strange that the Son of Heaven should set such store on any horse, and even stranger that the King of Ta Yüan should so resolutely refuse to part with even one when his kingdom was at stake. Why should any breed of horse have been so valuable? And why, if they were fine war-horses used by the troops of Ta Yüan, did the Chinese never succeed in capturing any alive on the battlefield? As Arthur Waley has suggested, their importance was probably religious rather than practical.

We know that Wu Ti, like many another strong-willed and absolute monarch, was determined to become immortal. Like Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, he sent expeditions to the magic islands of the eastern sea; he drank concoctions of powdered gold and cinnabar; he built a high "Dew-receiving Pillar" in his summer palace to

catch the essence of immortality exuded by the stars as they passed overhead and he drank that as well, mixed with powdered jade. He, like others, quite likely thought that the best way of all to become immortal was to ride directly to Heaven; and it was for this that the Heavenly Horse, or Dragon Horse, was needed.

It was a natural enough conceit. Many primitive rulers both East and West have had their horses buried with them, propped upright, saddled and ready to ride. Their intention, and their hope, must surely have been to ride to the Other World on the steeds thus provided. Indeed, according to the Chinese, a few particularly favoured emperors had already been transported to Heaven when they died by the particular breed of horse known as a Dragon Horse. If this was what Wu Ti had in mind it is not surprising that he would go to any lengths to obtain the Heavenly Horses which he believed the King of Ta Yüan to possess, horses red with sweat, striding swiftly across such great distances that they could even climb above the clouds to paradise. Nor is it surprising that the King of Ta Yüan chose to keep his horses, on which he may have believed his own hope of immortality to depend.

Chang Ch'ien's exploits and the westward expansion of China in the second and first centuries B.C. also opened up one of the most romantic trade routes in history, the long and perilous Silk Road. Throughout the Han Dynasty and long afterwards silk was China's most precious export. The furthest outposts of the Great Wall were the emporiums from which this, to western eyes, strange and rare material was transported across the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, and fragments of silk woven and worn many centuries ago can still be found, preserved by the dry desert air, at sites near Tun Huang and the western fortresses of the Wall.

Not only silk but the process by which it was made, the knowledge of the existence of the silkworm, remained a Chinese monopoly for centuries. The Chinese had no intention of letting outsiders share in so profitable a business. It was only in the sixth century A.D., when silk had already been known and highly prized in the Roman and Byzantine empires for well over six hundred years, that the secret of silk manufacture reached Europe. About 552, according to Procopius, some Indian monks who had travelled widely in the Far East and had actually seen silk being made, smuggled out some eggs of the domestic silkworm by concealing them in a hollow bamboo tube. They transported these either all the way from China, or possibly from Khotan or some other Central Asian kingdom which had recently learnt the art of sericulture, to the Byzantine Empire. There they demonstrated how the eggs should be hatched and the silkworms fed on mulberry leaves, how a number of the moths must

be reared and bred in captivity to assure a supply for the following year, and how the long, wonderfully strong filament could be unrolled from the cocoons.

Thus the monopoly was broken. Until then, despite the great quantities of silk which were carried by Persian and Turkish traders from east to west, the origin of the precious thread and even the nature of the land from which it came had remained a mystery to the West. Ptolemy and other writers used the names of Seres (from the Chinese "ssu", or silk) and Serica for the "Silk-people" and the country where silk was made, but they were extremely vague about its location.

One writer in embroidering on Ptolemy's statements described the Silk-people as living in a broad and fertile land, sheltered by "a circling and continuous barrier". These words are sometimes taken as referring to the Great Wall, and as proof that the existence of the Wall was known to Classical writers. It is by no means impossible; but it is more likely that he was only describing the lofty chain of mountains which were believed to prevent access to the mysterious land of Serica.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### NORTH AND SOUTH; THE WEI DYNASTY

THE FINAL collapse of the Han Dynasty in 220 A.D. was followed by four centuries of civil war, of short-lived local dynasties, independent war-lords and political chaos. The Great Wall ceased to have any significance as the boundary of China, for no single dynasty was strong enough to rule the whole of China. The centre of the Middle Kingdom moved south. Where the Yangtze River had once been the southern boundary of the country, and even under the Hans had remained on the fringe of Chinese civilization, it now became the heart of China proper; for three centuries the capital of the purely Chinese dynasties was to be located there.

It is these native dynasties which appear in the chronological tables of Chinese history. But of equal and sometimes greater importance were the northern dynasties which were established by non-Chinese peoples in north China and which straddled the Wall. The northern nomads had always been ready to take advantage of weakness in the Middle Kingdom, especially when, as happened towards the end of the Han Dynasty, there was a long period of drought in the lands north of the Wall and their usual pastures could not support them. But now their invasions took a more permanent form. The kingdoms they established in these four centuries often outlasted those of the south. They adopted Chinese customs, dress and habits, even to the extent of building their own frontier walls against the "barbarians". They became indeed the defenders of Chinese civilization against fresh incursions from the north.

The first half-century after the downfall of the Hans was the Period of the Three Kingdoms, Wei, Wu and Minor Han, a time of anarchy and romance, of heroic warriors around whose exploits many of the most famous stories of China have been woven. This was followed by the Western Chin, whose founder briefly reunited the warring kingdoms, re-established Chinese influence in the far west, and built a new wall adjoining the old from Chiu Ch'uan (Suchou) west as far as Tun Huang. But within fifty years barbarian pressure had forced the Western Chin to move south, where they set up a new capital at Nanking and, as the Eastern Chin, survived for another hundred years.

The Eastern Chin were succeeded in south China in 420 by the

Sung (or Liu Sung; not to be confused with the more famous Sung Dynasty of five centuries later), followed in turn by the Southern Ch'i, by the Liang and by the Ch'en Dynasties. None of these, despite their brave words and occasionally successful campaigns, ever extended their control over the north. Already in the time of the Three Kingdoms, Tartar tribes had occupied territory well within the Great Wall; after the fall of the Eastern Chin, China was definitely split into Northern and Southern Kingdoms and remained thus divided until the end of the sixth century.

In the story of the Wall the Southern Kingdoms played no part. Long stretches of the Wall indeed fell into ruin. But from time to time the Tartar kings of north China both made use of the existing Wall and built new walls of their own, north and south of it, traces of which remain to mark the ebb and flow of their power.

The longest-lived and strongest of the Northern Kingdoms was that founded by the Toba family, a branch of the Hsien-pi. The Toba, like other Tartars, claimed descent from the Yellow Emperor Huang Ti and traced their lineage back through innumerable sovereigns to the third millennium B.C., but they first appear in Chinese records in A.D. 275, when the son of their king came with other Hsien-pi chieftains to pay tribute at the court of Wei, northernmost of the Three Kingdoms. (It was from this kingdom that the Toba rulers later took the name of Wei for their own dynasty.) He was well received and entertained by the Chinese. Unfortunately on his return to the Toba camp his own people were convinced that he must have been corrupted by the decadent atmosphere of the south and, determined to maintain their own hardiness and simple ways of life, put him to death.

From that first contact with the Chinese court until their own downfall three centuries later, the Tobas were both drawn to and repelled by their more highly civilized southern neighbour. Of all the attempted unions of the basically antagonistic ways of life of the nomad Tartars and the agricultural Chinese, the Tobas came nearest to success. They maintained their mobility, being able to mount a lightning expedition against their hereditary enemies, the Jou-jan, and to live and fight as nomads. On the other hand they absorbed the best of Chinese civilization, fought to defend it, and left Confucianism, Buddhism and above all Chinese art greatly in their debt.

It was in 398 that Toba Kuei proclaimed himself Emperor of a new Wei Dynasty. At that time his empire included almost all north China east of the Yellow River loop; under his successors it extended from the sea to the western fortress of the Great Wall at Tun Huang. His capital was at P'ing Ch'êng, or Tai, about a mile

from modern Ta-tung, and there he now established a court closely modelled on that of the Middle Kingdom. He adopted the Chinese calendar, introduced music and ceremonial rites, and erected a Temple of Ancestors and an Altar of Heaven, at which he offered sacrifices according to Chinese custom. Although himself uneducated, he assembled a library of Chinese classics and historical works and founded a magnificent new university.

Toba Kuei's son and successor, Toba Ssu, was one of the great wall builders. He was probably the first barbarian ruler who built a wall to protect China from other barbarians. His wall drew a sharp line between the settled and the wandering Tartars. There had always been a difference between the two; between the vast, amorphous hordes of northern Tartary and the semi-civilized nomads of the border regions, who had fixed encampments and seldom migrated beyond fixed limits. But the contrast was never more clear-cut than during this period, when the Tobas built walls of defence against the Jou-jan.

Toba Kuei had already had trouble with the Jou-jan, a vagabond people who preyed upon their neighbours for some hundred and fifty years before they in turn gave way to the Tu-chüeh, or Turks. They were a difficult enemy. It was impossible to come to grips with them; they excelled even the Hsiung-nu in the art of dispersing when attacked and returning in force as soon as the pressure was withdrawn. In despair the Toba emperors nicknamed them Juan Juan, meaning to squirm or wriggle, like a heap of worms swarming away when disturbed. Uncivilized, without writing, using only goat dung as tokens with which to count, they were typical of all that the Chinese most dreaded and detested in the northern races, and the Tobas to some extent inherited their hatred. The Jou-jan for their part doubtless despised the Tobas as fellow-Tartars who had adopted alien ways.

In A.D. 423 Toba Ssu restored much of the old Wall and built some six hundred miles of new, strengthened by fortresses and outposts at regular intervals, in an effort to shut out the Jou-jan. His wall followed roughly the line of the present Wall, running along the north of Hopei and Shansi to the loop of the Yellow River. His successor, Toba Tao, carried out further extensive repairs on the Wall and added a second loop running north of present-day Kalgan.

Yet already in 428 Toba Tao was so harassed by renewed incursions of the Jou-jan that he decided to forget about the Wall and exterminate them once and for all. He marched north with a huge army, but when he reached the edge of the Gobi he did not make the mistake so many of his predecessors had done and press on until he was bogged down by the sheer weight of his own numbers. Instead

he detached a single corps of light cavalry, without baggage, and advanced so swiftly with these that he succeeded in taking the Jou-jan completely by surprise in their own camp. Before they had even had time to mount he had burnt their tents and captured many of their horses, and when those who did manage to escape dispersed in every direction according to their custom, he sent light columns of cavalry in pursuit, and many of the survivors were massacred as they fled. It was a dozen years or more before the Jou-jan again constituted a serious threat; a brief respite in a long history of warfare.

Most Toba emperors were strongly attracted by the south and the Chinese way of life. In 492 Toba Hung decided to move his capital from P'ing Ch'êng, where fierce dust storms blew down from the desert and where it sometimes snowed even in July, to the milder climate of Loyang. When his soothsayers consulted the milfoil (a plant much used in divination) regarding the proposed change they received a favourable answer. But he met with strong opposition from his ministers, whose property and whose investments were all in P'ing Ch'êng; they remained unconvinced even when he pointed out to them that their ancestors had already moved south three times from their original homeland on the shores of Lake Baikal, and that removing the capital to Loyang would only be a further step in the same direction.

Toba Hung did not press the matter. But a few weeks later he remarked to his ministers that the whole of China should be ruled by a single dynasty, adding that the present government of the Southern Sung Emperor was so corrupt that it was unlikely to last much longer. His ministers, foreseeing a quick and profitable campaign against the Sung, agreed enthusiastically. They advised the Emperor to raise an army of at least three hundred thousand men, build up stores of grain in Honan ready for the expedition, and move south as soon as possible.

When this had been done Toba Hung set off for Loyang. Whether he was lucky with the weather, or whether he knew and his ministers did not what the roads running south of Loyang would be like at that time of year, things fell out exactly as he had planned. Continuous rain followed their arrival in Loyang. The roads, poor at the best of times, were soon rivers of thick mud and quite impassable for horses, chariots or men. Toba Hung nevertheless insisted on carrying on with the campaign, and on the day appointed for their departure he mounted his own war chariot and rode out of the palace to take command of the troops. When the ministers, the imperial princes and the commanding generals joined in imploring him to change his mind, some holding back his horses, some throwing themselves to their knees before the chariot, and warned him that the soldiers had

had to be forced into their ranks and would certainly desert in great numbers as soon as they were outside the city, he reproached them for their lack of courage.

"I must yield to your decision," he told them at last, with apparent reluctance; "yet we have taken an irrevocable step in leaving P'ing Ch'êng in such great numbers and with such great preparations. What will posterity say of us if we now return, having neither undertaken nor accomplished anything? If we are not to proceed with this expedition, we must pretend that our coming here was a step taken with the sole idea of removing the court from P'ing Ch'êng to Loyang. Those who approve this idea, place themselves upon my right side."

With one exception, the princes, officers and ministers hastily ranged themselves on the right of the chariot.

Thus established in Loyang, Toba Hung increasingly reformed his court according to Chinese custom. The Tartar language, costume, weights and measures were prohibited, and only Chinese robes and decorations could be worn at court. Marriage between persons of the same surname was forbidden. Ancestor tablets were set up in the Chinese style, and regular sacrifices offered to Yao, Shun, Yü, the Duke of Chou and Confucius.

Toba Hung's son and Heir Apparent was bitterly opposed to all this. He hated Chinese dress, and in spite of the regulations continued to dress in Tartar style. He hated Loyang, where he said he found the heat oppressive, and hated the formal life of the court. He disliked studying the Classics and other subjects intended to fit him for the throne. At last, after trying in vain to persuade his father to move back to P'ing Ch'êng, he himself set out for the former capital with a handful of followers who thought as he did, intending to force the Emperor's hand. He did not succeed; soldiers loyal to Toba Hung arrested him and when he resolutely refused to adapt himself to Chinese custom he was put to death. The Wei Dynasty had turned its back once and for all on the life of the steppe and the nomad.

With the exception of Toba Tao, an ardent Taoist whom the Chinese illogically nicknamed the Buddhist Fox, the Wei rulers were zealous Buddhists. Pilgrims from the Wei court made their way west to the Tarim Basin, to Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan, all countries which were then important Buddhist centres, and even as far as India to bring back knowledge of the Buddha. The trade routes opened up by Chang Ch'ien and others between East and West became the channel through which Buddhism spread into China; spread, and took root, and continued to flourish long after it had died out in its native land.

Buddhist priests reputedly reached China as early as 217 B.C., when Ch'in Shih Huang Ti had them thrown into prison as vagabonds. But according to the Han Dynasty the actual introduction of Buddhism was the result of a vision which appeared to Han Ming Ti on the 15th of the first moon of A.D. 65, when he dreamed that a golden figure ten feet high and shining like the sun, flew into the courtyard of the palace and entered the royal bedchamber.

"My religion will spread into this land," he said to Ming Ti, and then he disappeared.

When the Emperor described this dream to his ministers next morning one of them remarked that he had heard of a new religion in the west, founded by a great spirit whose name was Fo, and that it must be he whom Ming Ti had beheld. An imperial embassy was therefore sent west in search of this new divinity. The envoys travelled as far as the kingdom of the Yüeh-chih, on the borders of India, and there they persuaded two Buddhist priests whom they encountered to return with them and preach the new doctrine in China. They also acquired sacred books and images of the Buddha, painted on fine Indian cloth, which they transported with them to the Han capital, Loyang, on the back of a white horse. The delighted Emperor Ming Ti thereupon built a great Buddhist monastery just outside the west gate of the capital to house his sacred treasures, and called it the Monastery of the White Horse.

In succeeding centuries many other travellers braved the world of demons, phantoms, hot winds and death which lay outside the Great Wall in search of enlightenment. Inside China the route of these pilgrims ran roughly parallel to the Wall, along the panhandle of modern Kansu, and at the last fortress of the Wall the governor would usually supply them with provisions for the crossing of the Gobi. Then they would strike west across the desert towards Khotan and, if they survived, westward again across the Pamirs—the "Roof of the World", which one pilgrim described as being midway between heaven and earth—and so into the land of the Yüeh-chih, or Kushan, and finally south into India. They walked across the whole of Central Asia.

It was a slow journey, broken often by the pilgrims' stopping to make a summer retreat or to visit monasteries in the Central Asian oases, or being delayed by the bad weather and snow which often made the mountains impassable. Fa Hsien, a priest who made the crossing in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and who left behind him a detailed account of the journey under the title, "Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms", was fifteen years on the way. Six of these were spent on the journey to India, six in visiting the sacred sites there, the cave where Buddha left his shadow, the

stupas and temples which housed his relics, the great monasteries; and three years in returning to China by sea.

In 518 the Empress Dowager of Wei sent Hui Sheng and Sung Yen, the latter being already a Buddhist monk, to bring back scriptures of the new Buddhist sect of the Mahayana, as yet unknown in China. Travelling by Khotan and Gandhara, they returned several years later with a hundred and seventy sacred books. Meanwhile the famous Indian missionary, Boddhidharma, whose travels Chinese Christians sometimes compare with those of Saint Paul and Saint Thomas, had reached China by sea and had eventually made his way to the court of the Tobas at Loyang. There he reputedly spent the last years of his life in meditation, facing a blank wall. His theory was that no one could obtain enlightenment by external works, nor by study, but only by contemplating the inner truth within oneself.

Yet even Boddhidharma discovered that the flesh was weak, for during his meditations his eyes sometimes closed and he fell asleep in spite of himself. Determined to overcome this failing, he finally cut off his eyelids and flung them out into the garden. Scarcely had he done so when Buddha appeared to him, praised his single-mindedness and told him that if he would look out of the window he would see that his sacrifice had not been in vain. There, in the garden, his eyelids had taken root. Within the next few days there grew up from them a plant with fragrant, glossy leaves, and Boddhidharma discovered that if he drank an infusion made from these leaves he had no difficulty keeping awake. Such was the origin of the tea plant. (Or so it is said; tea was in fact known in China at least two hundred and fifty years before Boddhidharma, if not long before that.)

When the pilgrims, Hui Sheng and Sung Yen, were returning from India they apparently met Boddhidharma on the Onion Range in the Pamirs. The Indian monk was walking rapidly towards the west, his robes disordered and both feet bare, carrying a single slipper in his hand. Sung Yen asked him where he was going. "To the Western Paradise," he replied. On reaching Loyang the Chinese travellers immediately inquired what had become of Boddhidharma, and when they were told that he had died some time before they described this meeting and suggested that his tomb be opened. The tomb, indeed, was found to be empty except for one shoe.

Critics may point out that Hui Sheng and Sung Yen in fact returned to Loyang several years before Boddhidharma died. But the image of the saint hurrying westward towards the paradise he had contemplated for so long, not stopping even to pick up his shoes, lingered in the mind of poet and artist.

It was this same spirit of deep faith which inspired the cave

sculptures of Yun-kang in north Shansi and Lung-men in Honan, near the earlier and later capitals of the Wei Dynasty respectively. These sculptures are strangely different from anything that preceded them. The slim, elongated figures of the Buddhas and Bodhisatvas, their pointed haloes, their calm and withdrawn expressions, have a unique grace and individuality. The Wei artists made use of the Indian, Iranian and even Hellenic motives which reached them by way of Gandhara, a state where Greek influence was still strong, and along the great trade routes of Central Asia. But it was their genius which combined these with earlier Chinese art to produce a single style, restful yet curiously alive, which had a profound effect on Chinese sculpture.

The most remarkable feature of these centuries of political turmoil, of shadow emperors who ascended the throne and were murdered or deposed almost before the ceremonies of their enthronement could be completed, was the continuity of its art. The cave temples of Lung-men, work on which was started by the later Wei Emperors, were completed by the T'angs three dynasties later. The shadow emperors often left more impression upon art than upon government. The Eastern and Western Wei, Northern Ch'i and Northern Chou Dynasties scarcely merit a paragraph in Chinese history, but their sculpture rivals that of the Wei Dynasty itself.

After ruling for over a hundred years as the strongest power in a divided China, the Wei Dynasty split into two in 535. The last Emperor, suspecting his Prime Minister, Kao Huan, of being about to seize the throne, escaped from Loyang to Ch'ang-an and placed himself in the hands of the governor of that city, a powerful and loyal noble named Yü-wen T'ai. Yü-wen T'ai, who, like the Tobas, was descended from a chieftain of the Hsien-pi, greeted the fugitive ruler outside the city walls and prostrated himself before the imperial chariot. The Emperor descended from his chariot and, raising the governor to his feet, appointed him there and then President of the Imperial Council and Grand General of his Estates.

"It is upon you that the honour of my family now rests," he told Yü-wen T'ai. "I place myself and my interests in your hands."

Yü-wen T'ai, tall, handsome, with a majestic carriage and acute intellect, is reputed to have been modest, sincere, and to have had the gift of winning the hearts of all with whom he came in contact. He seems at least to have won the hearts of the historians. He is described as having been the only honest statesman of his time, and even the fact that he very soon poisoned the Wei Emperor who had thus placed his life in his hands is counted to his credit; he did so, say the historians, because the Emperor refused to follow his advice and attempt to recapture Loyang.

Whatever his motives, Yü-wen T'ai himself never succeeded in reuniting Wei. A puppet ruler set up by Kao Huan in Loyang, and a puppet set up by Yü-wen T'ai in Ch'ang-an ruled for a score of years as monarchs of the Eastern and Western Wei Dynasties respectively. Then in 550 a son of Kao Huan usurped the throne of the Eastern Wei and founded the Northern Ch'i Dynasty. Not to be outdone, a son of Yü-wen T'ai usurped the throne of the Western Wei in 557 and founded the Northern Chou Dynasty.

Thus the Wei Dynasty, and with it the first period of Tartar rule in north China, came peacefully to an end. Neither Northern Ch'i nor Northern Chou survived for long. Yet even these short-lived dynasties hastened to build their own frontier walls and ramparts, or to repair existing walls, and left their mark on the northern defences of the Empire.

The Eastern Wei had built an inner loop of the Great Wall in Shansi, considerably south of the line of the old Wall, against renewed pressure from the outer barbarians. And now in 555 the first King of Ch'i began construction on a new wall three hundred miles long, running roughly from Peking to Tatung. One million, eight hundred thousand men are said to have been employed in building it, an unlikely figure when one considers that Ch'i at that time occupied less than a third of China proper. It was none the less an impressive achievement for the ruler of a minor kingdom at a time of such political unrest. And it endured. Parts of the Great Wall which are still to be seen near Peking belong to this sixth-century wall of the long-forgotten dynasty of Northern Ch'i.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### SUI AND T'ANG

"I water my horse and ford the autumn stream.  
The water is icy and the wind keen as a knife.  
The last rays of the sun illumine the sand  
And the dark mass of the T'ao Lake (in Kansu) looms before me.  
Of old the battles along the Great Wall  
Were fought with high courage,  
But the yellow dust envelops ancient and modern alike,  
And white bones lie scattered among the plants."

*"Frontier Song", by WANG CH'ANG-LING (T'ang Dynasty)*  
*Translated by J. F. FORD*

IN 577 the Northern Ch'i were conquered by the Northern Chou. In 581 Yang Chien, Duke of Sui, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander of Northern Chou, dethroned the young Chou Emperor and took the throne for himself. And in 588 Yang Chien moved south, crossed the Yangtze and entered the capital of the rival Ch'en Dynasty almost without opposition; the Ch'en Emperor indeed refused to defend the city, assuring his despairing ministers that the Yangtze was a moat provided by Heaven to separate the empires of north and south and that no northerner could hope to cross it. Thus suddenly China was reunited under the Sui Dynasty, a single empire under a central government.

Even before his conquest of Ch'en, Yang Chien had turned his attention to the Great Wall. In 585 the Tu-chüeh, who had succeeded the Jou-jan as the strongest single nomad power, forced the Wall along the Chou frontier and attacked in strength, and as soon as Yang Chien's forces had driven them back he decided that the Wall must be both repaired and extended. The newly built wall was to cut diagonally across the loop of the Yellow River, the northern half of which was still occupied by the barbarians, and also to run some two hundred miles west of the river; thirty thousand men were employed on this project during 585, and in the following year many others were put to work on a new system of fortifications and outposts.

Yang Chien nevertheless realized that the Wall alone never had, and never would keep out a strong barbarian army. He embarked at the same time on a highly successful policy of playing the Western and the Northern Turks off against each other, recognizing first one

tribe and then the other, giving Chinese princesses in marriage to both their Khans, and allying himself with whichever seemed the weaker power.

Yang Chien was one of the very few emperors who ever succeeded in carrying out an expansive policy, waging war, and constructing walls, roads and canals, without making excessive demands upon the people. He reduced expenditure by every possible means, ordering the troops stationed along the Wall, for instance, to occupy a strip of land immediately north of the rampart and grow their own crops there, thus making it unnecessary for the people to supply them with food. He himself set an example of economy by eating the cheapest food and not allowing even the Empress to wear silk or jewels, and of strict honesty by executing any official who accepted a bribe, even so much as a jar of wine. Moreover the country was at peace for the first time in four hundred years. During his reign the population of China doubled, a sure sign of prosperity.

But Yang Chien died suddenly in A.D. 604. Possibly he was not very popular with his own family. At least the story is that Yang Ti, his son and heir, decided that his father had lived long enough and disposed of him by piercing the heart of a clay image on which he had written Yang Chien's name. Commentators add that Yang Ti had only been chosen Heir Apparent in the first place because he insinuated himself into his father's favour by a false show of economy and of filial piety, and that although he pretended to be overcome with grief when the Empress died and to fast while he watched over her coffin, he actually kept supplies of meat in a hollow bamboo, stopped with wax, hidden under his robes. They also accuse him of attempting to rape Yang Chien's favourite wife while the Emperor lay dying, and of marrying her on the following day.

But Yang Ti, like Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, is one of the villains of Chinese history. Nothing is too monstrous to be believed of him. He is described as the worst Emperor in China's history, as having wantonly destroyed the Sui Dynasty and nearly succeeded in breaking up the newly reunited empire. His misdeeds are said to have reduced the two hundred generations and the three thousand years which the Sui Dynasty should have enjoyed to two generations and thirty years. Only on looking beyond his undoubted faults, chief among which was extravagance, to his undoubted accomplishments does it become clear how much later dynasties owed to this second and last of the Sui Emperors.

Certainly he deserved well of the empire for two of his achievements, both of which survived into the twentieth century, and he might have claimed credit for a third—the Great Wall—had it not been that there he followed in the footsteps of Shih Huang Ti. One

was his thoroughgoing reform of the system of schools and examinations along the lines it was to follow for the next thousand years and more. The other was the great network of canals, many of which still exist, which he built in order that all parts of the country should be connected with the capital by water as well as by road.

Old canals were enlarged and deepened, rivers dredged, and new canals cut to link up the many rivers of China. The Yellow River was connected with the Huai, and the Huai with the Yangtze, so that boats could travel between these two great rivers as well as along the innumerable small tributaries and other waterways fanning out from them. Altogether he built or rebuilt some four thousand miles of canal. And he built on a grand scale. The principal canals which linked his northern capital at Loyang to his southern capital at Chiang-tu (modern Yangchou, north-east of Nanking) were forty feet wide and lined with stone. Elms and willows were planted along both banks of the canals, and new roads built parallel to them. The smaller canals running east-west were less magnificent but they too were solidly constructed, and were bordered by a double line of trees.

Soldiers, hired labourers, and ordinary citizens were all put to work on these waterways. The soldiers, who were expected to do the heaviest work, were well paid, but the other workers were expected to contribute their labour free on certain days of the month. Every household had also to provide one "volunteer", between fifteen and fifty years of age, who received no pay at all. This did not endear Yang Ti to his people. Nor did the fact that, unlike his parsimonious father, he squandered as much on extravagant luxuries as he spent on construction.

Soon after his accession Yang Ti moved the capital from Ch'ang-an to Loyang, reputedly to avoid the scene of his former crimes. Like Shih Huang Ti he ordered nobles and wealthy merchants from all parts of the country to move to the new capital. Yet he still spent much time in Ch'ang-an, and he built at least forty palaces along the road between the two cities so that when he travelled from one to the other he could spend every night in comfort.

At Loyang itself he built a vast palace standing on the shores of an artificial lake, and surrounded by a park some seventy miles in circumference. Three islands rising from the lake, each a hundred feet high, represented the fabled Islands of the Immortals which lie in the Eastern Sea. Along the banks of the river which flowed into the lake Yang Ti built sixteen separate villas, each accessible by boat, for his sixteen favourite wives.

The park was his greatest pride. Sometimes for a special festival he would have thousands of fireflies collected from its woods and

released by the side of the lake. Sometimes when the leaves fell in autumn he would have them replaced by leaves and flowers made of paper and silk, and have artificial lotus flowers floating on the lake. He liked to sail there both day and night, singing verses of his own composition, the sails of his boat perfumed so that every breeze reaching him was fragrant. On moonlight nights, accompanied by his concubines and their female attendants, he would ride across the park on horseback.

His initial journey by canal to the Yangtze River was an extravaganza that must have been long remembered. He sailed with a fleet of dragon-shaped boats and transport junks, his own imperial barge being reputedly forty-five feet high, with four decks; the two lower decks were occupied by the imperial servants and eunuchs, the third by the ladies of the harem, while the top deck consisted of the throne room and the Emperor's private apartments. The Empress's boat was similar and only slightly smaller. Nine other boats were for the exclusive use of the Emperor and Empress, while hundreds of lesser vessels carried the imperial family and the court, priests, foreign ambassadors and visitors whom the Emperor wished to impress, and an army of cooks, serving women and domestics.

The imperial bodyguard also travelled by junk; the imperial cavalry lined the roads along either side of the rivers and canals. The whole stately procession, towed by eighty thousand men, is said to have covered over seventy miles of canal at any one time, and to have lived off the countryside; local mandarins were responsible for commandeering the necessary provisions from the unco-operative and resentful inhabitants of each region they passed through.

Yang Ti enjoyed dressing up his court, and he had designed new flowered uniforms for all his boatmen. Now he also conceived the idea of decorating his concubines' robes with different kinds of feathers, and as they travelled south he set the local population to catching birds. It is claimed that his depredations destroyed the bird life of China, but one might legitimately doubt the accuracy of this story when it is added that on one occasion his men started to cut down a tree so that they could reach a crane's nest located in its upper branches, whereupon, to save her fledglings, the mother crane plucked out her own feathers one by one and dropped them to the ground.

All this added fuel to the peoples' grievances. Meanwhile constructive works carried out by the Emperor, his building up of huge stores of grain to be used in years of famine, his strengthening of the frontier and the political acumen he displayed in dealing with the Tu-chüeh, went unnoticed.

Yang Ti deliberately modelled himself upon Han Wu Ti, whose

policy had been to unite the kingdoms of the Western Region under his suzerainty, while maintaining a firm barrier against the northern barbarians. For the first time since the Han Dynasty China regained her influence over Central Asia. Yang Ti sent expeditions far into the west, and the annals of the Sui Dynasty contain remarkably accurate geographical information about the western lands. Chang Yeh (modern Kan Chou), just inside the Great Wall, became a flourishing commercial centre from which long camel caravans set forth, and to which merchants from every kingdom of the Western Region made their way.

During 607 and 608 Yang Ti built another new section of Wall running east from the upper curve of the Yellow River, and completed the Wall that his father had been building diagonally north-east-south-west across the "loop" of that river. The Wall then must have followed a course not unlike its present one, and not unlike the original Wall of Shih Huang Ti. A strong, solidly built and continuous rampart stretched from the sea to the western curve of the Yellow River. In the far west the last two hundred miles or so of Wall, running out to the fortress of Yümen, were also strong, solid and in good repair. The weakest links lay, as always, just west of the Yellow River loop, where there was less pressure from the north and less need to protect the western trade routes, and where the loess walls were often neglected and forgotten.

How much of the Wall as it then stood was built by Yang Ti, how much repaired by him, it would be impossible to say, but during his reign it once again assumed the importance it had held during the Han Dynasty. Once again it was the dividing line between Chinese and non-Chinese; again it was an important element in the defence of the Middle Kingdom.

Yang Ti's relations with the Tu-chüeh were not without their lighter moments. In the summer of 607 the Son of Heaven travelled north of the border to receive the homage of their Khan, Ki-min, who was then on friendly terms with the Chinese. On reaching the Great Wall, at a point in the Ordos country within the Yellow River loop, he halted and sent messengers ahead to announce his arrival to the Khan.

The latter had summoned his hordes together into a single encampment and was making ready to receive Yang Ti. It was an impressive gathering, with the tents of the nomad leaders spread out over an immense area, outlying troops and their horses stationed as far as the eye could see in every direction, the standards of the different hordes silhouetted in the distance; but it must have seemed strangely barbarous to the Chinese envoys who carried the Emperor's message. That a ruler should live in tents, however spacious, and

that these should be set up in the open prairie, amid high grass, struck them as highly improper. They were afraid that their master might be insulted at being received in what seemed to them so uncivilized a setting.

Tactfully, the envoy asked the Khan whether this grass which grew so plentifully around his tent was a special form of aromatic herb.

"By no means," replied the Khan. "This is the same grass that grows everywhere in my lands."

"I see," said the envoy. "We in China only allow herbs and fragrant plants to grow near the palace of the Emperor, thus honouring him. But do not worry. I will explain to the Emperor that this is a form of some special Turkish plant."

Ki-min was nevertheless distressed by the thought that his imperial visitor might find his camp unsuitably prepared. As soon as the Chinese messengers were out of sight he and his nobles set to work with their daggers uprooting all the grass in the immediate vicinity of his tent.

Yang Ti's escort from the Wall to the Turkish encampment is said to have consisted of five hundred thousand horsemen and a baggage train three hundred miles long. A nought has probably been added somewhere, but we may safely assume that he did travel with as much pomp and splendour and as many troops as he could muster, his main idea being to impress the Khan. To this same end the camp which he now set up near the Turkish encampment was surrounded by an enormous circle of canvas, a backdrop on which the imperial palaces and the streets of Loyang had been painted, showing that wherever the Son of Heaven might travel he was always at home. This undoubtedly impressed the nomads, as well it might. They were convinced that only supernatural spirits would thus carry their own cities with them.

The two monarchs celebrated their meeting with three days of feasting. Yang Ti accorded special privileges to the Turkish Khan when he received him in audience, allowing him to keep his shoes on and his sword girt, giving him place above all Chinese princes, and not insisting that he pronounce his own personal name when doing homage. He then distributed two hundred thousand pieces of silk among the assembled nomad chiefs. Later Ki-min received the Emperor in his own tent and, kneeling, drank his health.

For the next few years the Sui Dynasty, and Yang Ti, were at the height of their power. People might complain of the labour demanded of them, and grumble at their ruler's extravagance, but China was peaceful, influential far beyond her borders, and reasonably prosperous. The kings of Turfan and Hami came to Loyang

to do homage, as did embassies from many of the smaller kingdoms of the Tarim basin. Yang Ti entertained all these visitors on a lavish scale, and in 608 he received Ki-min again with equal magnificence. In 609 he made another triumphant tour of the north-west, and the only nomad tribe which refused to do homage to him was heavily defeated.

Chinese armies pushed south, where they may even have reached the Gulf of Siam, and north-east into Korea. It was this last Korean venture, however, more even than his extravagance, that cost Yang Ti his throne and brought the Sui Dynasty to an untimely end. For Yang Ti was so determined that the Koreans should accept the benefits of Chinese civilization and submit to Chinese rule that nothing could persuade him to abandon the war even after it became clear that it could not be won. Fifty thousand war-chariots and three hundred specially built war-junks attacked Korea, in vain. The ungrateful Koreans held firm. After the third campaign the Korean ruler did, with some reservations, accept Chinese sovereignty but the country was never conquered; and by that time Yang Ti had thrown away the remaining reserves of the empire, sacrificed the loyalty of the army, and, worst of all, lost face by leading the unsuccessful expeditions himself.

Foolhardy Yang Ti undoubtedly was. But he was not alone in his dream of subduing Korea. Other emperors, even the great T'ai Tsung, wasted time and substance in fruitless campaigns against the peninsula.

By the end of the Korean war in 614 the tide had turned heavily against Yang Ti. In 615 he revisited the northern frontier but the new Khan of the Tu-chüeh, Ki-min's son, not only ignored his overtures but led a surprise attack against the Chinese troops. Yang Ti was forced to take refuge in Yen-mén, a heavily fortified stronghold in the Great Wall, while his army spread out along the line of the Wall and manned its defences. They were besieged there for two months, while all but two of the Wall fortresses fell into the hands of the enemy, until at last they had only enough food left for a few more days, and Turkish arrows were falling even inside the inner citadel of Yen-mén.

Like the first Han Emperor when besieged by Modun centuries before, Yang Ti was saved by a trick. The dowager queen of the Tu-chüeh, Ki-min's widow and a Chinese princess by birth, told the Khan that she had had news of a strong Uighur invasion in the north, which was quite untrue, and that if the Turks stayed any longer at the Wall they risked losing their own lands. Meanwhile a young officer named Li Shih-min, aged sixteen, who was with the small and quite inadequate Chinese army which was marching to

the relief of Yen-mén proposed to his commander-in-chief that as they approached the fortress they should spread their forces thinly, displaying all their banners and beating all their drums, in the hope of convincing the Turks that they were a great company. The ruse succeeded, and the Tu-chüeh withdrew.

But Yang Ti had lost heart, and courage. Instead of trying either to regain his influence in the north, or to put down the internal rebellions which had now broken out in several provinces, he immediately made plans to move his capital south to Chiang-tu. He may have thought that if he abandoned the north, he could hold the south. More likely, he foresaw the end and only wished to postpone it as long as he could, for now in Chiang-tu he shut himself up in one of the imperial palaces, abandoned himself to pleasure and debauchery, and refused to listen to the advice of the loyal officials who even then tried to save him. He apparently retained his sense of humour; it is said that one day as he looked at himself in a mirror he commented ruefully:

"What a handsome head. And what a graceful neck joins it to my body. Who, I wonder, is destined to sever the one from the other?"

In the end a group of his own men, led by a worthless scion of the Yü-wen family, decided that if the Mandate of Heaven had been withdrawn from the Sui Dynasty they would be the first to save themselves. They broke into the inner palace and assassinated the Emperor.

"Now even the fireflies have deserted the decayed grasses. . . .  
And to the last of your ancient willows only one crow comes  
home to roost."<sup>1</sup>

So the poets, remembering Yang Ti's lavish fêtes beside the lake, and the thousands of saplings planted along his canals, dismissed the last Emperor of Sui. Yet the brief Sui Dynasty has more constructive works to its credit than any other comparable period in the annals of China, excepting only that of Shih Huang Ti. It was Yang Chien and Yang Ti whose work paved the way for the grandeur of T'ang.

Everything that the Sui emperors had hoped to achieve was carried out under the dynasty founded in 618 by the Prince of T'ang, Li Yuan, and his able son, that same Li Shih-min whose strategy had saved Yang Ti from the Turks a few years earlier. Li Shih-min, who ascended the throne as T'ang T'ai Tsung, was probably China's

<sup>1</sup> "The Palace of the Sui Dynasty", by Li Shang-yin. Translated by Soame Jenyns.

greatest ruler—unless one looks back to the mythical Yao, Shun and Yü.

At a time when Europe had fallen into the hands of barbarians T'ai Tsung's capital at Ch'ang-an enjoyed a degree of wealth and culture unknown elsewhere. China was the most powerful and most civilized country in the world, and Ch'ang-an the most beautiful city. Chinese prestige in Central Asia was unrivalled. Chinese garrisons were posted as far west as Kashgar and Yarkand; Samarkand and Bokhara acknowledged Chinese suzerainty. Merchants, priests and embassies from half the world were welcomed at the T'ang court, and carried back to their own countries glowing accounts of China's splendour.

Buddhist painting and sculpture flourished, continuing to draw much of their inspiration from Central Asia; some of the few remaining examples of T'ang paintings have been found on the edge of the desert at Tun Huang. Religious freedom was complete. Priests of any country and of any persuasion were allowed to preach freely, and Nestorian Christians were among those who established their churches in the capital.

But the attitude of the early T'ang emperors towards the Great Wall was very different from that of their Sui predecessors. T'ang T'ai Tsung refused even to repair the Wall upon which Yang Ti had expended so much capital and so much manpower. Walls, he insisted, provided a false sense of security. Only by carrying the war to the enemy could lasting victories be won, and any ruling house which depended upon fortifications rather than on its army to hold the frontier would soon be ruined.

He himself had no need of walls. Brave, enterprising, a brilliant strategist, and withal modest, T'ai Tsung seems to have possessed the qualities and the energy of Shih Huang Ti and Yang Ti without their extravagances, conceit and superstition. It was not surprising that during his reign the pressure was from China outward, rather than inward from the nomad powers.

Yet despite T'ai Tsung's tolerance, and the constant flow of visitors to the T'ang court, no Chinese at that time was allowed to cross the Great Wall and leave the country without government permission. The priest Hsüan Tsang, a celebrated Buddhist pilgrim who travelled to India and compiled a "Record of the Western Kingdoms" so detailed and so accurate that it is still useful to modern archaeologists, applied for such permission several times and never received an answer. At last, after being fired upon by the archers on guard, he succeeded in slipping across the Wall by night and made his escape.

On his return from India fifteen years later, however, Hsüan

Tsang had no difficulty in re-entering China. The prohibition only applied to leaving the country, and in any case by then he had become a celebrity. He was officially received outside the Wall and escorted to Ch'ang-an, where he was welcomed by T'ai Tsung himself and enthusiastically acclaimed by the people.

The century following T'ai Tsung's death in 650 was remarkable for two other brilliant reigns, that of the Empress Wu and of Ming Huang. Although it ended in disaster the early years of Ming Huang's long reign were a golden age; its painters and its poets, Wu Tao-tze, Li Po, Tu Fu and many others, are the most famous in China's history, the ideal of succeeding centuries. But with the rebellion of An Lu-shan in 755 the inevitable decline set in. Chinese control of the west crumbled, and the region fell into the hands of the Uighurs and other Turkish peoples. The central government was undermined, T'ang armies were defeated both in the north and the south, and independent princes and warlords seized power.

Even had the Wall been in good repair it could have had little or no effect upon the outcome. The Wall prevented minor raids; it was an important weapon in the hands of a strong ruler and a strong army; but it could never protect an empire that was crumbling from within.

Once again China broke up into warring kingdoms, once again north and south were divided, and again the north fell an easy prey to "barbarians". For nearly five centuries North China, and for a time during the Mongol conquests the whole of China, was to be ruled by dynasties originating outside the Great Wall.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### TRIUMPH OF THE BARBARIANS

THE T'ANG DYNASTY splintered into the Five Dynasties, which were succeeded in 960 by the Sung Dynasty. But the Sungs never quite succeeded in reuniting China. Culturally and intellectually brilliant, the Sung emperors left a remarkable legacy in painting, pottery and literature, but there was no T'ang T'ai Tsung, no Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, not even a Yang Ti among them. The first two emperors, Sung T'ai Tsu and Sung T'ai Tsung, tried indeed to repeat the pattern and in 982 Sung T'ai Tsung almost managed to reconquer the north; then the tide turned, and none of the later Sung rulers had the energy, political ability or military strength to succeed where he had failed. Their attitude was well expressed a century later by the then Empress Dowager, when the Emperor planned to make one last attempt to reoccupy the area inside the Great Wall.

"Have you," she asked, "made ready all the arms and the provisions necessary for such an enterprise?"

"Everything is prepared," the Son of Heaven assured her.

"Yet this is a great expedition," she went on, "and how can you be sure of success? It seems to me that if you are victorious, all you will have gained will be the congratulations of your courtiers. Yet if you are defeated you will expose the kingdom to war. If the north could indeed be conquered, would not T'ai Tsu and T'ai Tsung have conquered it?"

"Enough," said the Emperor; "we will speak no more about it." And the expedition was cancelled.

The Sungs' opponent in the north was a formidable one. During the tenth century a people of Mongol tongue, descendants of the Hsien-ki, had established a new empire in what is now Manchuria and Mongolia and they now pressed south to occupy the greater part of north China. The Chinese called them the Ch'i-tan, or Khitan, and it was this name, corrupted as "Cathay" or the Russian "Khitai", by which China itself became known in medieval Europe. Cathay was not just another, romantic name for China. It was for centuries the only name known to those who approached China overland through Central Asia. Marco Polo knew north China as Cathay, and south China as Mangi, and even long after the time of Marco Polo, Europe and the western world remained firmly con-

vinced that Mangi was China and that China and Cathay were two different countries.

Already in 936, before the foundation of the Sung Dynasty, the Khitan had captured the city that is now Peking and made it their southern capital. There, like the Tobas centuries before, they gradually adopted Chinese customs and culture. Chinese exiles were welcome at their court, Chinese rites and ceremonies were observed, and they took a Chinese name—Liao, or Iron—for their dynasty.

The history of the fifth and sixth centuries now repeated itself in the tenth and eleventh. For two centuries north and south, Khitan and Sung, fought, made peace, intrigued, and never managed to win a clear victory. The pressure was mainly from the north, and most of the time the Sung were paying a large annual subsidy to their northern neighbours to keep the peace; a hundred thousand silver taels and two hundred thousand pieces of silk every year, according to a treaty signed in 1004, as well as an occasional Chinese princess given in marriage to the Khitan imperial family.

Although the Sung soon gave up all attempts to dislodge the Khitan from inside the Great Wall, the inner, southern loop of the Wall running west of Peking played a considerable part in the wars between them, and towards the end of the tenth century a large Chinese army succeeded in occupying the area between this and the main Wall. They quickly erected new blockhouses along the inner wall, and repaired its battlements and fortresses. They also planted rows of willow trees to prevent the Khitayan horsemen from outflanking their positions.

The frontier then ran very close to Peking, and the capital itself was almost in the front lines. The border was as arbitrary and as difficult to defend against infiltration as the present-day border between Jordan and Israel. The shortest route between Peking and other Khitan cities scarcely thirty or forty miles away cut across a wedge of Chinese-held territory. Farmers on either side encroached on the other. Trespassers and night-raiders were common, and while the Chinese tried to cut Khitan lines of communication the Khitan soldiers crept across by night and cut down the willow-tree defences of the Chinese.

The struggle between Khitan and Sung was complicated by the existence on their western frontiers of Hsi Hsia, an independent state established by descendants of the Tobas, which was sometimes allied with the Chinese, sometimes with the Khitan, sometimes at war with one or both of them. Meanwhile in the north-east another nomad tribe, a Tungusic people known to the Chinese as the Nuchen, now challenged the supremacy of the Khitan.

About 1125 the Nuchen finally succeeded in driving out the Khitan, and they, too, made Peking their capital. The Sung, under-estimating this new northern colossus, made one last attempt to reoccupy the whole of China, with the result that the Nuchen swept south, captured the Sung capital of K'aifeng and carried the Sung Emperor, Hui Tsung, north to die in exile. The Sung thereafter abandoned north China to their enemies and held court at Lin-an, or modern Hangchou, which they transformed into one of the most beautiful cities in the world and where their emperors devoted themselves to art, literature and calligraphy; an elegant, sophisticated and faintly nostalgic court which survived until the final conquest of China by Kublai Khan.

The Nuchen took the name of Chin, or Gold, for their dynasty in contrast to the Iron Dynasty of the Khitan; iron, their founder pointed out, could rust and decay but gold was both brilliant and everlasting. The Golden Tartars ruled north China for over a hundred years. Their lands extended far on either side of the Great Wall, which therefore served no purpose, but the more settled and more civilized they became the more they, too, seemed to feel the need of walls, and they built their own walls further north.

These successive conquerors of China were men of the inner and not the outer steppe, of that marginal region which shared some of the characteristics of China proper. They did not build walls against the Chinese on their southern flank but against other nomad tribes. And many of their walls were earthen ramparts, intended to mark the fluctuating border line between the inner empires and the outer steppe rather than to halt invasion. No one knows how many such walls were built, or when, but travellers in Mongolia have observed at least three distinct walls north of the Great Wall and there were probably many others.

Both the Liao and the Chin Dynasties also built major walls, which probably were intended for defence, running south-west to north-east along the crest of the Khingan Mountains; the Chin wall was at least five hundred miles long and extended north as far as the 48th parallel. The Chins also built a second wall in the west, north of the Yellow River loop and roughly parallel to the Great Wall there, which they called the Ongu and which the Chinese knew as the Wai-pao.

All these were soon to be overrun by the greatest of the conquering nomad powers. Early in the twelfth century, while Khitan, Nuchen, Hsi Hsia and Sung manoeuvred for position, the Mongols were still a group of scattered tribes living south and east of Lake Baikal. Such they might have remained had it not been for Temuchin, better known as Genghis Khan.

When Genghis was born in 1167, in his father's camp on the banks of the Onon River, he was given the name of Temuchin because the Mongols had just defeated a rival chieftain of that name and it was their custom to name a child after some welcome event. His father, Yesukai, was an important Mongol chieftain. But Yesukai died, poisoned, when his young son was only thirteen and many of his clans refused to recognize such a stripling as their leader; it was only after several years of fighting and intrigue that he won back his rightful position as chieftain.

From then on Temuchin steadily gained ground. His rise to power was possibly not as spectacular as it seems to us looking back, now that the names of Genghis and the Mongols conjure up an irresistible horde, an avalanche which almost overnight engulfed the world. He had powerful enemies, and there must have been moments when it seemed to others, if not to himself, that he would do well if he even succeeded in holding his father's inheritance. It was not until the turn of the century that he overthrew the Keraits, the Naimans and other rival nomad tribes, and could call himself master of all Mongolia.

"And so, when all the generations living in felt tents became united under a single authority, in the Year of the Leopard (1206)," says the History of the Mongols, "they assembled near the sources of the Onon, and raising the White Banner on Nine Legs, they conferred on Genghis the title of Khagan." Already legends gathered around him. It is said that when the ceremony took place a stone lying nearby spontaneously burst open and disclosed a seal of carved jade, which was kept as a palladium by the descendants of the great conqueror.

In 1209 Genghis captured the capital of Hsi Hsia, a city on the site of modern Ninghsia, where the Great Wall crosses the Yellow River. This placed him in a position to attempt the conquest of north China, which he invaded for the first time in 1211.

The Great Wall could not halt the Mongol conquest of China. But it delayed the conqueror's advance. The great fortresses of the Wall, the bastions of Chü-yung Kuan and Tzu-ching Kuan, made it impossible for Genghis to hold the territory conquered in the invasion of 1211. His forces for a time succeeded in occupying Chü-yung Kuan but they were soon forced to abandon it, and it was another two years before they could finally break down these last strongholds of the Wall.

Further west meanwhile the Wai-pao or Ongu had fallen into Mongol hands without fighting. The Onguds, a Tartar tribe who had been employed by the Chin rulers to garrison the western wall, and took their name from it, had quickly realized where their own

interests lay and offered their allegiance to Genghis several years before his first attack on China. Thus he was assured of a free passage both across Ongud territory and through the outer Wall.

In 1213 the final struggle for Chü-yung Kuan and possession of the main Wall took place. Genghis marched against the fortress in September of that year, but was unable to breach its defences. The great stronghold had been newly fortified with outer trenches and earthworks, the surrounding countryside had been strewn with caltrops to prevent the approach of cavalry, and according to one account the northern gate of the fortress had been sealed with iron so that it could not be opened to the invaders even if the garrison wished to surrender.

After camping outside the pass for over a month, with no sign of any weakening on the part of the defenders, Genghis decided to outflank it—a manœuvre to which he owed many of his victories. He sent a relatively small force to try and take the Tzu-ching Kuan, south-west of Peking, and this they did. Swarming through into the plain before the Chin armies which were hurriedly despatched to the spot could stop them, they then pressed on and attacked Chü-yung Kuan successfully from the south. Slaughtering great numbers of the Chinese, they forced their way through to the north gate and thence out through the defile to rejoin the main body of the Mongol army.

Early the following year Genghis attempted to take Chung Tu, or Peking. There again he was halted by walled defence. The first Chin emperors had enlarged the capital of the Liao and had built such enormous walls that critics at the time had mocked them for extravagance and ostentation. Now they were proved right. The forty-foot walls, with their triple line of moats and their several hundred towers, were flanked by four separate walled city-forts, about a mile square, standing one on each side of the city and connected with it by underground tunnels. Each fort had its own towers, moats and fortifications, arsenals and granaries. The Mongols could not storm the capital from any direction without being subjected to fire from one side or another, and after two major assaults had failed they agreed to make peace and retire again behind the Wall. Under the terms of the peace treaty Genghis received an imperial princess, five hundred girls and five hundred young men, three thousand horses, gold, silver and silk.

No sooner had Genghis retired than the Chin ruler abandoned his capital and moved south to K'aifeng, and in 1215 the Mongols at last captured Peking. The city was sacked, the usual fate of any city taken by the Mongols after strong resistance. The fires in the imperial palaces blazed for several weeks, and months later the bones

of those who had been massacred could still be seen heaped in great mounds outside the city walls. The victors meanwhile retired again but they carried off with them whatever they could find of value, gold, silks, curious treasures from the palace, and innumerable prisoners. Among the latter was one Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai, a descendant of the imperial family of the Khitans, tall, bearded and handsome, who was presented in person to Genghis Khan.

"As a Khitan you must welcome my victory over the Chin," said Genghis. "I have avenged your ancestors."

"My father and I have served the Chin faithfully all our lives," said Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai; "how could I think of them as my enemies?"

Much impressed by this answer, Genghis took the young prince into his service, bestowed on him the name of "Long-beard", and soon appointed him Chief Minister. Moderate in all things, patient and far-seeing, combining the qualities of Tartar and Chinese, Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai not only saved the lives of innumerable people but provided a civilizing influence without which Genghis' conquests would probably have been much less firmly based than they were.

In 1224 Genghis marched west to invade India, but turned back without having attacked that country. What made him change his plans was reputedly an encounter, in the mountains of Tibet, with a strange beast not unlike a large deer, but with the tail of a horse, and a single horn. This animal knelt at his feet and addressed him thus:

"Prince! Return whence you came!"

"What does this creature mean," Genghis Khan asked Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai, "who salutes me and speaks to me like a human being?"

"This," replied the Khitan, "is the Chio Tuan, an animal so swift that it can cover three thousand miles in a day, and one which understands many languages; it is a gentle animal, with a horror of slaughter. Your Majesty has now been at war in these kingdoms for four years. It may be that Heaven has seen enough of bloodshed and has sent this creature to warn us to retire."

Genghis promptly turned back.

As late as the nineteenth century it was firmly believed that a species of unicorn did exist in the uplands of Tibet. But whatever it was that Genghis saw, Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai seized the opportunity of preventing an Indian campaign.

Two or three years later he also saved the kingdom of Hsi Hsia from destruction. The Mongols, habitually living by the chase, without agriculture, without houses, found the cultivated country of the Hsia little to their liking and the pasture there inadequate. Why not, they suggested to their leader, exterminate the whole of the agricultural population and convert the land into pasture for

their horses? Genghis was inclined to agree; he was never bothered by the number of people slaughtered if it was for a reason that seemed to him good. It was Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai who persuaded him that it would be more profitable to keep Hsi Hsia as vassal state. The fields of the Hsia were fertile, he pointed out, and its people hard-working. As a subject race, they could be taxed; they could also provide grain, wine, silks and silver in tribute, and they could keep the Mongol army supplied with bows and arrows.

Genghis died in the summer of 1227, just as he was completing the final conquest of the Hsia. His last words concerned the strategy, successfully carried out a few years later, by which the Mongols should complete the overthrow of the Chin. Yet, great general though he was, Genghis was far more than the ruthless conqueror, the savage barbarian warlord, with whom we are familiar. He was also a creator and an administrator. Even in the heat of the campaign he gave thought to the organization, the social and political economy of his expanding empire. Realizing that it was their adoption of things Chinese and their dependence on Chinese officials which had finally weakened the Toba, the Khitan and the Nuchen alike, he inaugurated a policy of employing outsiders, Turks, Uighurs and others in the government and having as little as possible to do with the Chinese scholar-gentry.

The great Khan died in the Ordos country, within the bend of the Yellow River, and apparently he died a natural death. It was not surprising that both his enemies and his own people found this hard to believe. The Mongols themselves tell, with varying details, the story of his end. He was hunting one day, they say, and he was so struck by the contrast between the red blood of a hare and the white snow against which it lay that he demanded of his men where a maiden could be found whose skin was like the snow, and whose lips were like blood.

They told him that such a princess was the wife of the king of the Red-walled City, which stands where the Great Wall meets the Yellow River. And when Genghis had killed her husband and taken this princess, she hid a tiny knife under her finger-nail and castrated him. (It is a Chinese custom for high-class men and women alike to wear at least one finger-nail excessively long, showing that they never indulge in manual labour.) Genghis cried out, but when his guards came to see what was the matter he only said, "Take this girl away; I wish to sleep."

He has been sleeping ever since, the Mongols say, and one day when he awakens he will return to them. As for the princess, she threw herself into the Yellow River, which the Mongols now call Khatun Gol, or River of the Princess, and it is said that above the

spot where she was drowned the river runs quite clear, while downstream it is muddy and yellow all the way to the sea. The people searched for her body but it was never found. Only a single pearl-embroidered slipper remained, which they buried and over which they raised a tumulus in her memory.

(The story of the princess is based on legends far older than Genghis Khan, reflecting a time when the Jung and Ti barbarians, and also the people of Ch'in, used to sacrifice a girl to the Yellow River every year to win the favour of the river spirit. The exiled princess, Chao Chün, was also said to have thrown herself into the Yellow River, and we have seen that the Chinese believe it to be called River of the Princess in her honour and not that of the princess of Ninghsia.)

Genghis Khan's body was taken north to his homeland for burial. No Mongol could contemplate resting forever in the alien lands south of the Wall. And once when the cart on which his coffin lay was stuck in the mud his companions reproached Genghis' spirit for its seeming reluctance:

"O Lion of mankind, your palace tent of felt, your golden abode, your realm founded upon justice; all are there. Your standard made from the black tails and manes of bay stallions, your drums, your trumpets, your flutes, the prairies of the Kerulen, the place where you mounted the throne as Khagan, all are there. Your wife Burte whom you married in your youth, your faithful comrades, all are there. Because this country is hot, because the Tanguts have been conquered and their queen is beautiful, do you wish to abandon your people, oh my Khan?"

Scarcely had they finished speaking when the cart moved forward of its own accord.

The great Khan is generally believed to have been buried in an unknown grave in Outer Mongolia. Marco Polo's account, possibly based on a misunderstanding, tells how everyone encountered by the funeral cortège on its long journey was massacred by the Mongol soldiers with the cry: "Go serve your lord in the next world!" But a sanctuary claimed to be his grave still exists at Ejen Khorö in the Ordos, not far from where he died, and there a few relics are preserved.

The lingering importance of Genghis Khan in modern Mongolian politics is shown by the fact that in 1939 the Kuomintang moved these relics into Kansu, and in 1949 further west into Tsinghai for safekeeping. The Chinese Communists none the less eventually gained possession of them and brought them back to Ejen Khorö. There, in 1955, they completed a new mausoleum to house the supposed remains of the great conqueror. It is doubtful whether

either Kuomintang or Communists take much interest in Genghis Khan for his own sake, but his ghost is a most useful ally to any ruler of Mongolia.

At Ejen Khoro sacrifices are held every year at the spring equinox, and each pilgrim offers his sheep or mare, his bowls of wine and his silken scarf. The guardians of Genghis' coffin open it in spring and autumn, placing summer or winter clothes inside according to the season, and when they take these out again they are said to be well worn. Two white horses, assumed to be those of Genghis, also attend the annual ceremony; recently one of these did not appear for four or five years and when he did come back he showed signs of having been hard ridden, which was of course taken to mean that Genghis is preparing to return to his people.

The story of the Mongols after Genghis is well known. How they swept into Europe, which was only saved from still further invasions by the death of Ogotai in 1241. How Kublai Khan completed the conquest of China against valiant but hopeless resistance on the part of the Sungs, and reunited the whole of China for the first time since the fall of the T'angs; reunited it for the first time under foreign rule.

Kublai built a great new city on the site of Peking, Khanbalic, the City of the Khan. The outline of his city walls can still be traced north of Peking, and at least one tower in the present city dates from Mongol times. But the Emperors of the Mongol Dynasty never liked to spend much of their time in what seemed to them the warm south, and they still travelled north to Tartary for the summer months. Kublai moreover had one of the courtyards in his new palace at Khanbalic sown with prairie grass to remind him of his native steppe.

The splendour of the Mongol courts, described by Marco Polo and others, became legendary in the west. Early in the fourteenth century Friar Odoric told how the Khan travelled from Khanbalic to Shang-tu, the poets' Xanadu, the summer capital which he had built about fifty miles outside the Great Wall. Massed horsemen rode in front, on either side, and behind, so that he travelled as it were in the centre of an armoured cross. His two-wheeled chariot, drawn by elephants and horses, was a complete house in itself, built of fragrant wood and gold, covered with fine skins and decorated with precious stones. The Emperor always carried with him twelve gerfalcons, which he could loose from the chariot if any birds were near, and sometimes the whole cavalcade would halt so that he could enjoy a day's sport.

The Great Wall itself was of very little importance during the Mongol Dynasty, and we have seen that Marco Polo does not mention it. In 1345, however, a curious gateway was erected at Chü-

yung Kuan, near Nankou Pass. Indian in style and decoration, it is remarkable for a Buddhist charm inscribed on it in six different kinds of characters and is often known among foreign travellers as the Language Arch.

By the end of the fourteenth century the Mongols had lost the explosive energy, and the mobility, with which they had half-conquered the world. In China their dynasty was overthrown by a new native dynasty, the Ming, whose early victories drove the Mongols out of China proper and out of the border districts lying between the Great Wall and the desert of Shamo as well. But not for long. The Mings' policy was basically one of isolation and non-expansion. Little by little the Mongols and other nomads drifted back into the comparatively fertile lands just outside the Wall which they considered to be rightfully theirs.

Once again the Great Wall had become the dividing line between the opposing cultures, and the symbol of their enmity.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### PRESTER JOHN

THE BEND of the Yellow River where it flows north, then east, then south, in the great horseshoe loop that is such a conspicuous feature of the map of China, has always played an important part in the history of the Great Wall and the border states. It is, so to speak, the hinge where the eastern section of the Wall joins the western. The actual location of the Wall there varied from century to century according to the pressure from either side, but ever since the time of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti there have been two main walls in the area; sometimes one was rebuilt and repaired, sometimes the other, and sometimes both. The outer wall followed the course of the river north and east, breaking away from it where the river swings south and then running due east towards the sea. The inner wall cut diagonally across the loop from south-west to north-east.

It was in the Ordos country, within the loop of the river, that Mēng T'ien had his headquarters when he supervised the building of the Wall. It was through the Ordos that contact, friendly and otherwise, was most often made between China and the north; the Tartar Khans took this route when they travelled south to pay their respects at the Chinese court, and again when they swept down to raid the plains or to attack the Chinese armies. Exiled princesses such as Chao Chün crossed the river and the Wall there on their journey to the steppes, as did the Emperor Yang Ti when he visited the Turkish camp. It was while campaigning in the Ordos that Genghis Khan died.

When China was strong the whole area was Chinese. But it was always a marginal area; much of the land within the loop was more suitable for pasture than for agriculture, and it was usually occupied by semi-settled nomad tribes. Often, like the tribe of the Onguds whose allegiance to Genghis Khan opened the way to the conquest of China, these border people were subsidized by the Chinese to act as Guardians of the Wall.

The Ordos and the neighbouring lands immediately outside the Wall were one of the main centres of Nestorian Christianity during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nestorianism indeed flourished throughout Central Asia at that time, from Samarkand and Yarkand in the west to Mongolia and north China in the east. The Onguds and some of the Uighurs were Nestorians, as were the powerful

tribe of Keraits. Nestorian gravestones carved with crosses, flowers and inscriptions in Turkish Uighur, the script from which Mongolian was derived, still lie scattered and half-buried on the plateau north of modern Kueisui and the Ordos. The ruins of old cities are still to be seen there too, where today the sand blows across empty desert, evidence that the region was once far more populated than now.

It was this surprising success of Nestorian Christianity in the Far East which made the fabulous stories of Prester John, the magnificent myth which for centuries gripped the imagination of Christian Europe, seem credible. The story of Prester John only indirectly concerns the Great Wall, the supposed kingdom of the Presbyter having been located in this area where the Wall and the Yellow River run together. But it is an interesting sidelight on the relations between East and West which centred so much upon the Wall, and on the ignorance of one another which enabled a legend based on falsehood and wishful thinking to survive for so many centuries. At the close of the sixteenth century many Europeans still believed that a fabulously wealthy Christian kingdom existed in Asia.

When the Nestorian belief that the divine and human aspects of Christ were two separate and distinct natures was declared a heresy at the Council of Ephesus, in 431, many of the followers of the Patriarch Nestorius, thus condemned, turned to missionary work in the East. Their doctrines were soon widely known in lands otherwise untouched by Christianity. They reached China early in the seventh century, during the time of T'ai Tsung, and their success there is clearly shown by a tablet which was erected in Ch'ang-an in 781 and which describes, in Chinese and Syriac, their arrival and the preaching of their religion through the years.

Not all rulers, however, were as tolerant as T'ang T'ai Tsung, and before the end of the T'ang Dynasty Nestorianism and other foreign religions had been proscribed and their adherents persecuted. Christianity on any appreciable scale died out in China. It was a second wave of Nestorian missionaries who carried their faith triumphantly into Central Asia during the eleventh century, and converted a great number of the nomads. The Keraits were probably the first to be baptized, early in the eleventh century, after their king, who had been overtaken by a blizzard while out hunting, was saved from disaster by a celestial voice which he believed to be that of a Christian saint. He and two hundred thousand of his people immediately embraced Nestorianism and other minor tribes followed suit. (These wholesale conversions were not without their problems; how, the missionaries wrote to their patriarch, could these



The attempt on the life of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti by Ching K'o. (A stone relief carving from a Han Tomb of the second century A.D.) On the right Ch'in Shih Huang Ti is seen holding up a jade disk, his symbol of authority. Part of his sleeve has been torn off and lies on the floor behind him. Ching K'o is on the left, his hair standing on end with fury, and the poisoned dagger he has just hurled at Shih Huang Ti can be seen piercing the stone pillar. The head of General Fan lies in its box on the floor.



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Yu-wen T'ai, statesman and father of the first Emperor of the Northern Chou Dynasty (founded in 557 A.D.)

people give up meat on fast days when they ate no food except meat and milk?)

Medieval Europe held strange ideas about the north-east of Asia, the uttermost bounds of the continent that stretched so far beyond their knowledge. As we have seen, it was believed to be the land of Gog and Magog, of the cannibals and other barbarous peoples whom Alexander the Great had imprisoned beyond an impassable barrier. Yet there were persistent rumours, undoubtedly based to some extent on actual Nestorian successes, that Christianity had spread through Asia and that St. Thomas had visited India and China before he died and converted their peoples. At one moment the Europeans believed the inhabitants of Asia to be the soldiers of Antichrist, who would break through the Wall of Alexander at the Day of Judgement; the next they believed them to be a great Christian power which would soon come to their aid against the infidel.

When the Khitan were driven out of China by the Nuchen in 1125 one of the Khitan imperial princes, Yeh-lu Ta-shih by name, escaped and fled to the west with only a few hundred followers. Several of the smaller Tartar hordes who disliked the Nuchen joined forces with him, others supplied him with horses, camels, sheep and cattle, and as he made his way across Central Asia he either conquered or received the submission of a number of small kingdoms. Finally, after covering well over a thousand miles, he founded a new empire in the region of the T'ien Shan mountains, centred near modern Chuguchak, which was known as the Kara Khitai, or Black Khitai.

In 1141 Yeh-lu Ta-shih and the Kara Khitai won a crushing victory over the Seljuk Sultan Sinjar, which marked the end of Islamic expansion in Central Asia. Yeh-lu Ta-shih was not a Christian; although there may have been a few Christians in the ranks of his army, the Kara Khitai were largely Buddhist. But that mattered little to the West. The infidels had been halted, defeated and thrown back. A great new power seemed to have arisen in Central Asia, and if this new empire was the avowed enemy of Islam was it not natural to assume that it was a Christian empire?

Soon after this, in 1145, the Syrian Bishop of Gabala reported to Pope Eugene III that he had been told of a certain King John, a Nestorian priest, who claimed descent from the Magi and who now ruled over the extreme Orient. It seemed that this King, or Prester John, had won a great victory over the Persians and had then set forth with his armies for Jerusalem, intending to come to the aid of the Crusaders there. Unfortunately he had been unable to cross the Tigris. At first he had assumed that the great river would freeze over in winter, as did the rivers of his own land, and he had

camped beside the river bank for several months; when that failed he had marched a long distance upstream in the hope of finding a place cold enough for the river to freeze. Finally, seeing no sign of ice, and having already lost many men in the unaccustomed heat, he had been forced to turn back.

Thereafter every rumour of new leaders or new campaigns in further Asia was traced to the mysterious Prester John. The hope of an Eastern ally who would help them against the infidel grew increasingly strong in Christendom. Then in 1165 the Pope, Frederick Barbarossa and the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenos all received letters from Prester John himself. Who forged the letters, or why, no one knows but they were enthusiastically received in a Europe preoccupied with the Crusades; read, re-read and widely circulated. At least a hundred copies of the original letter are known.

The great monarch had no other title than Presbyter or Prester John, so the letter said. It was impossible for one "whose butler was an archbishop and king, whose chamberlain a bishop and king, whose master of the horse was an archimandrite and king, whose chief cook an abbot and cook, to be called by such titles as these". As for his kingdom, there was no marvel which was not contained within its borders. The giant ants that could dig gold out of the earth were to be found there, and the fish which produced wondrous purple dyes for the imperial robes; the worm called salamander which lived in fire and from whose incombustible skin the robes of the Presbyter, which could be washed in fire, were made; the pebbles which render their possessor invisible, the Fountain of Youth, the Sea of Sand, and the River of Precious Stones, all were his. Moreover there were no poor in his dominions, no thief or robber, no flatterer or miser, no dissensions, no lies and no vices.

When the king rode forth to war, so he said, "Thirteen great crosses made of gold and jewels were carried in wagons before him as his standards, and each was followed by ten thousand knights and a hundred thousand footmen." No army could withstand his might. And now at last he had decided "to visit the sepulchre of our Lord with a very large army, in accordance with the glory of our majesty, to humble and chastize the enemies of the cross of Christ and to exalt his blessed name".

It was not surprising that this message was welcome, or that Pope Alexander III wrote to Prester John in the hope of establishing relations with this Christian potentate. Nor was it surprising that when news of Genghis Khan's greater victories were later received in Europe the Mongol was presumed to be Prester John himself. Even when it became clear that the Mongols were by no means Christians, many people in the West remained convinced that they must

nevertheless be the long-awaited Eastern allies, and assumed that they were probably on the verge of being converted to Christianity.

The wave of terror caused by the first Mongol invasions of Europe was therefore followed by a strong feeling that the overwhelming power of the Mongols might be turned to good account, and that a Mongol alliance against the Moslems would destroy the infidel once and for all. Meanwhile the Mongol conquests, bringing Asia under one rule, had re-opened the trade routes between Europe and China. Within two or three years of the Mongols' furthest penetration to Europe, while the West still cowered under the threat of further invasions, the same Pope Innocent IV who had proclaimed a holy Crusade against them was sending ambassadors to the Mongol court in the hope of converting the barbarians. Louis IX also sent envoys to the Tartar capital, Karakorum, where they were well received.

The hope of converting the Mongol Emperors was not altogether without foundation. The Mongols seem to have acted on the assumption that the more priests of any religion who prayed for them, the better. Kublai Khan's mother was a Christian. Kublai himself observed the festivals of the Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and Buddhists alike, remarking that, "Whichever of the Four Prophets, Christ, Moses, Mohammed or Buddha, turns out to be Master in Heaven may give me his aid." Kuyuk Khan was so inclined towards Christianity that a Christian temple stood near the Khan's imperial tent, and a great number of his officers became Christians. At one time during the Mongol Dynasty there were said to be thirty thousand Christian churches in Cathay.

Although the victories of Yeh-lu Ta-shih, who was a heathen, probably gave birth to the idea that a great Christian monarch existed in Asia the nearest to a real Prester John was Ung Khan, or Wang Khan, or Tughrul Khan, the Christian king of the Keraits to whom Genghis Khan swore allegiance when he first succeeded to his father's inheritance, and whom he later overthrew. (The Christians attributed Wang Khan's downfall to the fact that he had married an infidel.) It was Wang Khan whom Marco Polo identified with the famous Presbyter.

The Keraits remained Nestorians long after the death of Wang Khan. Their kingdom, Tenduc, lay on both sides of the Yellow River loop and the Great Wall, its capital being just north of the river, and according to Marco Polo it was ruled over in his day by one Prince George, a Christian and reputedly a descendant of Prester John. John of Montecorvino tells how he converted this same George, "of the illustrious family of that great king who was called Prester John of India", from Nestorianism to the true Catho-

lic faith. Many of the people of Tenduc were converted at the same time, and George himself took holy orders; he also built a great new Catholic church in Tenduc. After his death, however, although the people remained Christian for some little time, they reverted to the Nestorian heresy of their forefathers.

Gradually, as more missionaries, ambassadors and merchants travelled to the Mongol empire it became obvious that if Prester John existed he ruled only one of many tribes, and his kingdom was in no way remarkable. It also became clear that the Mongols were not, and were not likely to become, Christian. But the myth would not die. If Prester John, the great monarch, the expected saviour of Christendom and Hammer of the Infidels, did not exist in Asia that could only mean that he had been driven out and had established his kingdom elsewhere. (He had presumably become immortal as well.) By the end of the fourteenth century it was generally accepted that Prester John was the Christian, immensely powerful king of Abyssinia, and it was not until a hundred years later that Portuguese travellers proved beyond all doubt that the Abyssinian king, whatever he might be called, was no mighty monarch whose wealth and whose ardour could be called upon to fight against Islam.

And still the belief in the Priest King lingered on. Now he moved back again to Asia, for with the fall of the Mongol Dynasty a curtain had once again descended between China and the West; it was again possible to believe that some mysterious Christian kingdom existed in the far corners of the East, beyond that strange land of Cathay described by Marco Polo and now half-forgotten. It was not until the opening years of the seventeenth century that the last wishful thinkers were finally disillusioned.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE MINGS

THE DYNASTY founded in 1368 on the ruins of the Mongol empire by Chu Yuan-cheng, otherwise known by his reign name of Hung Wu, governed China for two hundred and seventy-six years. Preceded by the Mongols, followed by the Manchus, it was the last native dynasty of China. It took the name of Ming, or Brilliant, and although by comparison with Han or T'ang the Ming Dynasty inevitably seems less than brilliant, its early emperors could claim credit for remarkable achievements in architecture, in government, in law and in public works.

The Ming Dynasty carried out more construction on the Great Wall than any other ruling house. Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, Yang Ti, and perhaps Han Wu Ti, did more as individuals, but every Emperor of the Ming Dynasty from first to last took some part in rebuilding or repairing the great rampart. The Wall as we see it now, although in places its foundations may be well over two thousand years old, largely dates from the Ming Dynasty. Peking, and the present walls of Peking, were also the work of the Ming Emperor Yung Lo. Indeed almost all the existing city and frontier walls of China, as well as the great majority of temples and palaces still standing in China today, were built by the Mings.

The vast empire of the Mongols collapsed quickly. In the east they were forced to withdraw from Manchuria and Korea, and in the west Hung Wu's armies campaigned as far as the foothills of the T'ien Shan; Turfan, Hami and other Central Asian oases again recognized Chinese suzerainty. The new Emperor, claiming to be the legitimate successor of the Khans, even marched north and for a time occupied the Mongol capital at Karakorum. Individual Mongol armies and individual tribes nevertheless long refused to acknowledge the Ming Emperor as their sovereign. Skirmishes, rebellions, and surprise attacks on outlying Chinese positions persisted for many years in the north. And against these the Wall proved of great value.

Hung Wu appointed as his heir a grandson, son of his eldest son. But the boy's uncles were too strong, too ambitious, and shared too much of their father's character to accept the rule of so young a prince. In 1403 one among them, the Prince of Yen, seized the throne for himself and became Emperor under the reign name of Yung Lo.

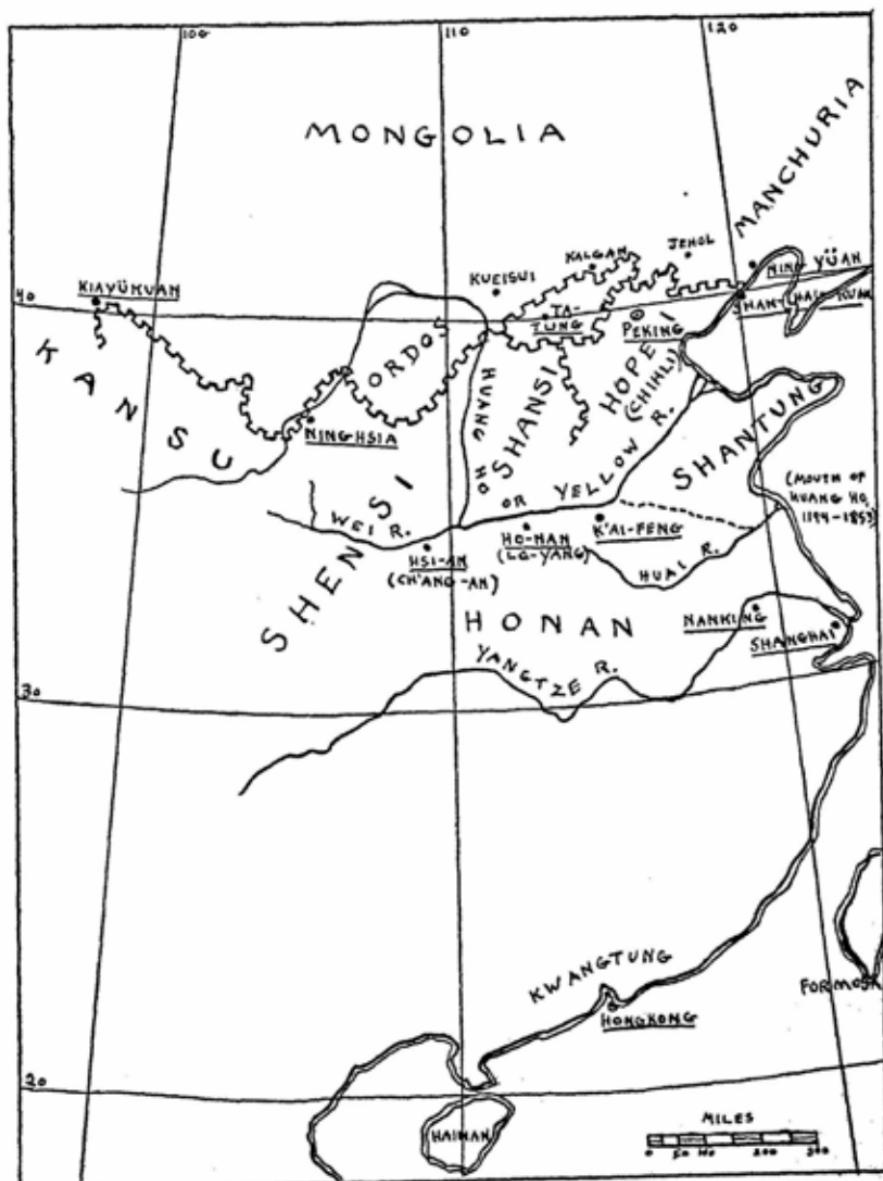
The first Ming emperor, whether from choice or from military necessity, had moved the capital from the Khanbalic of the Mongols south to Nanking. Yung Lo now removed it back to Peking. He knew the north, the province of Yen was his own state, and he was convinced that the centre of the kingdom must be in the north, since it was always from the north that danger came. He may also have been reluctant to remain in a capital which had so recently been ruled by his young nephew, the legitimate heir to the throne.

It was Yung Lo who thus gave Peking its present shape, who planned that great Forbidden City whose space and grandeur still take one's breath away, the temples, the broad avenues and the city walls. These new walls were roughly fifteen miles in length and forty feet high, with an inner core of mud, gravel, lime and occasional layers of bricks, faced with a thick shell some seven or eight bricks deep; the broad, paved platform running along the top of the walls was protected on the inner side by a parapet and on the outer side by battlements. Each of the nine gates was approached through an outer gate and a semi-circular walled enclosure. Work on the wall was not quite finished during Yung Lo's reign, but seems to have been completed early in that of his successor. Within a few years of the great emperor's death the walls of the city probably appeared much as they do today, their monumental grey ramparts surmounted at intervals by brightly painted gate towers.

Yung Lo then turned his attention to the Great Wall. Determined that the frontier should be made impregnable, he repaired and rebuilt the entire length of the Wall. He stationed ten men to guard every single point along the Wall at which herdsmen or merchants travelling on foot might enter China, and garrisons of a hundred men at every pass wide enough for horsemen or wheeled traffic to cross the border. Many of the separate Martello towers outside the Wall also date from Yung Lo's time.

But Yung Lo had already had too much experience of his northern neighbours to rely on the Wall alone for defence. It was a line, needing support in depth. He and his immediate successors attempted to provide this support in two ways. One was by entrusting the maintenance of the frontier to friendly nomad tribes on the fringes of the empire who preferred the advantages of an alliance with China to the dangers of an alliance with the outer barbarians, a policy which had often been adopted by earlier dynasties. The other was by establishing large, fortified camps inside the Wall, where Chinese soldiers lived with their families, reclaiming and cultivating the land, and were only on duty along the Wall for a week or two at a time.

Both policies were moderately successful. But nothing could alto-



THE WALL IN MING AND MODERN TIMES

gether tame the barbarians. Yung Lo himself mounted at least three major campaigns against Outer Mongolia, leading them in person. These were expeditions on a large scale, well organized, with seasoned troops and a reserve of transport vehicles to carry provisions to the army at fixed intervals, and they succeeded in forcing the Tartars to keep their distance. The basic problem nevertheless remained exactly what it had been when Mu Wang's vast armies returned from the desert with four wolves and four white stags; the very nature of the land and the ways of its people. In one sortie Yung Lo is said to have covered over a thousand miles of steppe and desert without encountering a single enemy. Yet within a year or so of his return the barbarians were attacking all along the frontier.

Yung Lo was taken ill in 1425 while returning from the last of these campaigns. He died outside the Wall. His body was carried back to Peking with great pomp and ceremony and, after lying in state for about a year before the astrologer could decide on a sufficiently auspicious day, he was laid to rest in the great amphitheatre which he himself had chosen as the burial ground of the Mings.

This enclosure, where thirteen of the fifteen Ming emperors were buried, lies in a horseshoe of hills about thirteen miles south of the Great Wall and was carefully chosen in relation to that rampart. From the point of view of the geomancers, it was an ideal location. The valley opens out only towards the south, which is always the most favourable direction. On one side of the opening stands a hill shaped like a tiger, and on the other side a hill shaped like a dragon, so that the two guardian spirits of east and west can keep watch over the entrance. The Great Wall protects it from the pernicious, low-flying influences which come from the north. A single watch-tower was also erected due north of the graveyard, outside the Wall, in order to attract any of the favourable, high-flying influences which might come from the same direction and guide these over the Wall to the Ming tombs.

Yung Lo's tomb, now newly restored by the present Chinese government, is by far the largest and the most magnificent of the tombs, as indeed it should be. Splendid though it is, however, the city of Peking itself still stands as his greatest monument.

Yung Lo's son and successor reigned only a year, and his successor only ten years. The latter is best remembered because, being concerned for the welfare of the imperial staff, he founded a school within the palace for the younger eunuchs and by so doing hastened the growth of the canker which was to destroy the Mings, as it had done other dynasties before them. It was less than seventy years since Hung Wu had warned the court that eunuchs must on no account be allowed to play any part in the life of the palace except

that of servants in the women's apartments. Once they were employed in any official capacity, he said, they undermined the state like so many mice and foxes nibbling away unseen. To make sure these orders were obeyed, Hung Wu had engraved an edict forbidding the use of eunuchs in the administration on an iron slab three feet high which he set up in the palace as a warning to his successors.

Hung Wu did not exaggerate the danger of the eunuchs' influence. Their shadow has darkened many episodes in Chinese history and the brave and faithful eunuchs, such as that Wang Ch'eng-an who strangled himself at his dead master's feet when the Ming Dynasty finally came to an end, are few indeed to set against the innumerable creatures whose greed, treachery and love of power destroyed their rulers. Usually of low birth and little education, resentful, frustrated and unscrupulous, they were often also of outstanding ability. Set apart from other men, their separateness was a source of strength and clannish unity. Moreover they alone had access to the entire palace, and could use the various and varying favourites of an emperor as dupes or confederates to further their own ambitions.

In theory the eunuchs were slaves. They are sometimes said to have been introduced into the Inner Courts by the Emperor Yu in the eighth century B.C. as one of his attempts to amuse his melancholy concubine Pao Ssu, but there were probably eunuchs at court long before that. During the T'ang Dynasty their functions included buying or requisitioning supplies for the imperial city, command of the palace armies, and control of all Taoist and Buddhist monasteries in the capital. The extensive espionage system of the palace was operated by them, and imperial couriers reported to them. Such duties were well calculated to place them in a commanding position, and although in succeeding centuries their powers were several times curtailed, and they were restricted to menial occupations, they sooner or later crept back into control.

Their employment in key positions was favoured by a few emperors in the mistaken belief that they would thereby prevent the formation of unofficial "dynasties" among the officials, where power could be handed on from father to son. The eunuchs obviously could not transmit their power to their sons, but they arrived at the same end by adopting nephews and other members of their families.

The effect of the newly improved status of the eunuchs under the Mings was already visible in the next reign when the Emperor came to depend absolutely upon the eunuch Wang Chen, who had been his companion as a boy. Wang Chen alienated the Emperor's advisers, antagonized the northern barbarians, and weakened the

army. The climax came when, unknown to the Emperor, he agreed that the king of the Oirads, a tribe of western Mongolia, should receive a Chinese princess in marriage; when the king sent horses, furs and other gifts as a marriage settlement, Wang Chen appropriated these for himself and disclaimed all knowledge of the agreement.

The Oirads thereupon swept across the Wall into north-west China. Wang Chen persuaded the Emperor to lead an army against them in person, with himself as military adviser, and since they were both completely inexperienced in warfare it was not surprising that the expedition came to grief. The war chariots were delayed, supplies were either lost or failed to reach them, and when other ministers tried to persuade the emperor to take shelter in the fortress of Tzu-ching Kuan the eunuch retorted indignantly that literary men knew nothing about fighting and insisted on camping out on the plain. Completely exposed, with few chariots and no reserves of arms or men, they were also short of food and water.

At first the Tartars found it hard to believe that their enemies could be so unwise and, suspecting a ruse, did not attack. But when their own spies confirmed that the Chinese position really was as weak and as untenable as it appeared to be they fell upon the encampment and thousands of Chinese, including Wang Chen, were killed. The emperor meanwhile, who was as brave as he was misguided, seeing that all was lost, dismounted, laid his imperial mat upon the ground, and knelt there—facing south, as the Son of Heaven must always do on official occasions—awaiting death. Apparently absorbed in meditation or prayer, he paid no attention whatever to the battle going on around him. This serenity so impressed the Oirads who took him prisoner that he was treated as an honoured guest, and was allowed to return to Peking in the following year, when more or less friendly relations were re-established between the Oirads and the Chinese.

Peace along the frontier was seldom maintained for long. In 1470 the Great Wall was restored and rebuilt across the loop of the Yellow River. In 1535 the western stretches of the Wall, ending at Chiayikuan, were completely rebuilt. Yet throughout the sixteenth century pressure from the northern tribes constantly increased. The north-west frontier suffered every year from raids, and in the east Peking itself was under siege once or twice; the barbarians never attempted to take the capital by force but they looted the surrounding countryside and carried away with them considerable booty in the shape of prisoners, animals and foodstuffs.

The later Ming emperors were often tactless and vacillating in their attitude towards the Tartars. Suspicious, unfriendly, yet weak,

they provided the northerners with genuine grievances at a time when they were not strong enough to subdue them by armed force. The Tartars for example were constantly asking permission to hold regular fairs at fixed points along the frontier, where they could sell their horses, furs, hides and the precious ginseng root, all of which the Chinese wanted to buy, but the Chinese government wavered, now granting permission, now refusing it on the suspicion that the barbarians would spy on the Middle Kingdom. At last the nomads, unable to trade, turned again to pillage.

Unlike the Mongols, whose great empire had been open to anyone who wished to enter, whether as traders, pilgrims or ambassadors, the Mings disliked and discouraged foreigners. They desired no contact with the West. Wan Li made this clear in 1619 to the Russian Tsar, who tried to establish friendly relations: "By my custom, O Tsar, I neither leave my own kingdom nor allow my ambassadors or merchants to do so."

From the end of the Mongol Dynasty until the beginning of the seventeenth century few travellers, and no Europeans, entered Cathay through the gates of Chiayükuān. Those few entered on sufferance. A Turkish dervish in about 1560 described how the caravan with which he was travelling across Central Asia came out through a narrow defile in the mountains and approached the great fortress which barred the road to the Middle Kingdom. There they were halted and closely questioned by the sentries. "Whence do you come? What do you bring?"

The leader of the caravan explained why and whence they had come, stressing the fact that they were carrying much rare and valuable merchandise, and this information was relayed from watch-tower to watch-tower along the Great Wall and to the capital. According to the answer received the caravan would either be admitted into China and allowed to proceed to Peking, as in this case, or turned back.

Official embassies to China, which were infrequent, were received somewhat more cordially. A mission sent by Shah Rukh, the son of Timur, to the Ming court during the fifteenth century was met by Chinese officials some distance outside the Wall and royally entertained with banquets, musicians, dancers and other amusements, before being escorted to the gate at Chiayükuān. But despite these courtesies every member of the mission, some five hundred in all, had to be counted, carefully scrutinized and their names registered before they were allowed to cross the frontier.

It was Wan Li, who came to the throne in 1572 and died in 1620, whose long reign sealed the fate of the Ming Dynasty. And it was Wan Li who had most to do with the building of the Wall. Indeed

Wan Li's name is so closely associated with the present Wall that sometimes its name of Wan Li Ch'ang Ch'êng is taken to mean "Wan Li's Long Wall" instead of "Ten Thousand Li Long Wall".

New sections of the Wall were built running west of the Yellow River, and between the Yellow River and the sea the older parts of the Wall were restored once again. Everywhere along the Wall, especially in the mountainous country north of Peking, there are innumerable plaques, tablets and inscriptions which record the name of Wan Li. Some are matter-of-fact inscriptions which simply register the work done: so many feet of "First Class Wall" built here, so many feet of "Middle Class Border Wall" or "Third Class Wall" completed there; others are accompanied by poems describing the beauties of the view and of the scenery. Many watch-towers also show evidence of having been repaired during Wan Li's reign.

This feverish building was a sign of danger, not of strength. There was no strong government, no strong army, of which the Wall was a symbol. Now more than at any other time in its history, the Wall was China's Maginot Line. Wan Li's predecessor might erect twelve hundred forts along the Wall during his reign of only six years; Wan Li himself might boast of the great number of miles of Wall to his credit. But within the Wall the heart of China had decayed.

Wan Li had abandoned himself to extravagance and debauchery. The treasury was empty. Droughts, famines, floods on the Yellow River, Tartar invasions on the frontier and exorbitant taxation in the provinces had impoverished the country. But no memorials to that effect ever reached the Emperor; no Censors were heard. Only a few favoured eunuchs were ever received by the Son of Heaven. Only eunuchs were entrusted with the collection of taxes, the equipment of the armies, and the use of public funds. The eunuchs now ruled the Imperial City, and the empire. They not only controlled and censored all communication with the Emperor, but maintained their own private armies and supervised all government appointments.

Wan Li was succeeded by his son Kwang Tsung, a prince of strong character who might well have restored the power of the Mings had he lived to do so. But he fell ill within a few days of his accession and, having summoned the Grand Council and recommended his fourteen-year-old son, Hsi Tsung, to them as his successor, died almost immediately. Before his death he had been persuaded to swallow a wonder-working pill of "red lead" guaranteed to produce immortality, and it was generally believed at the time that this had contained poison. Kwang Tsung was known to be

hostile to the eunuch party, and his firmness and honesty had made enemies at court; whatever the original cause of his illness it seems likely that the eunuchs had taken the opportunity to dispose of one whom they knew to be a potential enemy.

The young Hsi Tsung unfortunately hated everything to do with administration, hated authority and responsibility alike. His only real interest in life was carpentry. His ambition, which he fulfilled, was to build a miniature palace, furnished throughout with tiny lacquer tables, chairs and screens, and roofed with miniature tiles specially baked in the imperial kilns, in the garden of the palace.

All governmental authority he handed over to the eunuch, Wei Chung-hsien, who had attended him in his childhood and who had always, for his own reasons, encouraged the prince to devote himself to carpentry and not to study. During the seven years of Hsi Tsung's reign Wei Chung-hsien was the absolute ruler of China; perhaps the most powerful of the many eunuchs in China's history who have risen from the Inner Courts to supreme power.

If occasionally Hsi Tsung, admonished by the few remaining honest Censors or by his Empress, the beautiful Precious Pearl, did attempt to take an interest in the administration, Wei Chung-hsien was quick to divert him with other amusements, with theatricals and banquets. He also persuaded the Emperor to take drugs in ever-increasing quantities, assuring him that these would strengthen his delicate constitution. His hold over Hsi Tsung was complete. Soon there was not a Minister left at court who did not support or at least acquiesce in all that Wei Chung-hsien did; they had no other choice unless they were to be exiled or executed on charges of treason.

Every sign of prosperity, of which there were few, and every supposed or imaginary success against the barbarians was credited to Wei Chung-hsien. He was compared to Confucius and worshipped in the Imperial Academy, and in the year 1626 temples were erected in his honour in all but one of the provinces of China. Whenever he appeared he was saluted with the cry, "Nine Thousand Years!" only a thousand less than the Son of Heaven's traditional salute of "Ten Thousand Years!" It was even claimed that because of him a unicorn, a creature only to be seen on earth during the lifetime of some transcendent sage, had appeared in Shantung.

Nothing was done during these years to resist the rising pressure from the Manchus, the new power in the north. Half-hearted attempts to defend the northern approaches to Shanhakuan failed, and the Chinese armies were withdrawn inside the Wall, holding only one or two outer strongholds such as Ning Yuen. In 1625 the Manchus occupied the whole of the Liaotung Peninsula and raided

the Peking plain, withdrawing only because the Wall behind them was still in the hands of the Chinese.

By this time a few Jesuit missionaries were established at the court of Peking. They had been allowed to enter the country when it became known that they possessed certain scientific skills, in particular a knowledge of astronomy and clock-making. They were employed mainly in reforming the calendar and predicting eclipses. Now they also did what they could towards the defence of the country by casting cannon and cannon-balls for the use of the army. This activity on their part was much criticized in the West. Yet in the eyes of the missionaries their casting of cannon was undoubtedly justified, since it was only by making themselves useful in such practical matters that they were allowed to stay and to preach their gospel to the Chinese people. Their cannon unfortunately were far more highly valued than their gospel. Mounted on wheels or tripods of iron or copper, these were called "Weapons of the Gods" and were placed at strategic high points along the Wall; later the rank of General was officially bestowed on each cannon, and individual cannon even received divine honours.

Meanwhile insurrections had broken out in all parts of the Middle Kingdom. Secret societies such as the White Lotus further undermined government control. War-lords, some ruling a few thousand men and some an entire province, terrorized the countryside unchallenged by any central authority; in Shensi and Honan the bandit leader, Li Tzu-ch'eng, had already built up the nucleus of the army which was to carry him to the dragon throne. The Forbidden City remained apparently indifferent to domestic and foreign crises alike. Even the vital dykes along the Yellow River were neglected, and cities flooded by that treacherous river were simply abandoned.

Hsi Tsung died in 1627, aged twenty-one. Against the wishes of Wei Chung-hsien, the Empress Precious Pearl succeeded in persuading him to appoint as his successor his brother, Ch'ung Chêng. Uneasily aware of the dark shadows that he had refused to face, the dying Emperor urged his brother to rule with a firm hand, to make his own decisions, and to avoid the errors that he himself had fallen into. Yet he remained ignorant of the real cause of his misfortunes; he recommended Wei Chung-hsien as the one man in whom the new ruler could place complete confidence.

Ch'ung Chêng had no such illusions. Nor had he any wish to rule. Only Precious Pearl's insistence that there was still a chance of saving the dynasty persuaded him to accept the throne. Having accepted it, he did the best he could, and for a few years it may have seemed that the Empress was right and that the Mings would sur-

vive after all. Wei Chung-hsien was accused of treason, and when he hanged himself to avoid trial he was condemned to the most ignominious fate a man can suffer in the eyes of the Chinese, his body being disembowelled and his head displayed on a spike at the gate of his native city. Other notorious eunuchs suffered the same fate.

But the disease had gone too deep. All loyal servants of the crown had long since been liquidated, either during Wan Li's reign or under Wei Chung-hsien's dictatorship, and scarcely a single uncorrupt official remained at court. There was no one on whose advice the new Son of Heaven could rely. Almost every Minister, every Censor, to whom he turned betrayed him; nor could he prevent the eunuchs from regaining control. For every eunuch dismissed or brought to justice others seemed to spring Hydra-like into key positions. Within a few years it was clear that nothing could long postpone the downfall of the Brilliant Dynasty. The question was whether its successor would come from within or without the Great Wall.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### BENEDICT GOÉS

THE JESUIT missionaries whom we have seen reforming the calendar and, somewhat reluctantly, acting as gun-founders at the court of the Mings had come to the Middle Kingdom by sea. They had come to a land they knew as China. They did not know, and even those few who suspected the truth could not prove, that it was the same country described by Marco Polo and others as Cathay, the land where Christianity was so deeply rooted that John of Montecorvino had been able to convert the Christian king of a Christian tribe from Nestorianism to Catholicism.

The mistake was natural enough. Under the Mongol Dynasty, Cathay, which took its name from the Khitan Tartars who ruled north China in the tenth century, had been open to trade, to pilgrims and to missionaries. The Pope, Saint Louis and other rulers had despatched missions and embassies to the Mongol court; John of Plano Carpini had carried a message to Kuyuk Khan in 1245, and a few years later William of Rubruck travelled to the Tartar court at Karakorum in the hope of converting Mangu Khan. Although the Mongol Emperors themselves never did become Christian, Christianity was widespread in their lands, there was no restriction on the preaching of the Gospel, and even Mangu Khan's secretary was a Christian.

With the collapse of the Mongol empire and the coming of the Mings an impenetrable curtain descended between Cathay and the west, leaving Europe with the firm conviction that many Cathayans were already Christian and that Christian churches there were numerous. Friars and Bishops were occasionally despatched from Rome or Avignon to try and make contact with these remote brethren, but none succeeded. They could not know that Roman Catholic and Nestorian communities alike had died out in the Middle Kingdom soon after the expulsion of the Mongols; that even in Central Asia, where at one time entire tribes had been converted to Nestorianism, the Christian religion was extinct; that Islam had extended its influence throughout the Western Region, and Buddhism throughout China.

When the Jesuits reached China by sea two hundred years later they found no evidence of Christianity nor any memory that it had ever existed. Later one or two bells engraved with crosses and Greek



The tomb, or flower garden, of Chao Chün, about eight miles south of Kueisui



Nestorian gravestones in Inner Mongolia, showing the cross and other designs



*(Above)* One of the corner towers in the north Wall of Peking



*(Left)* The Little Dragon Gate in an inner loop of the Great Wall, on the edge of the "Lost Tribe" territory

inscriptions were unearthed, but that was all. The missionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had to begin their work anew, with no flicker of remembrance which they could fan into belief, and it seemed to them self-evident that this pagan land had never known Christianity.

At about the same time Mohammedan merchants who had travelled overland across Central Asia to Chiayükuan and been allowed to enter China from the north-west returned with the news that they had reached the fabled Cathay, and had found it still a land of Christians and Christian churches. Here surely was proof that Cathay was not China. Christianity was unknown in China. The Mohammedans were probably speaking in good faith, misled by various superficial features that were common to Buddhism and Christianity but alien to Islam, by the use of images to represent the deity, by religious music and processions. In any case they, who were eye-witnesses, not only declared that there were innumerable Christians in Cathay but seem to have believed that even the ruler of the newly rediscovered land was a Christian.

The memory and myth of Cathay had haunted the West for years. One of the objectives of the great maritime adventurers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of Columbus and the Cabots, was to find that fabulous land again. Yet when the Portuguese did open up the sea route to China, and the first Europeans were allowed to enter the Middle Kingdom once more, they found no evidence—quite apart from the question of Christianity—that this new country was Cathay. Where was the city of Khanbalic, or Zaitun, or the beautiful Quinsay? Where were the other cities described by Marco Polo? The new explorers reached Hangchou and Ch'üan Chou, Yangchou and at last Peking, but they were completely unaware that these places had been known before.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci, thanks to his knowledge of astronomy, had been received at the court of the Mings and had been granted permission to establish a small mission in Peking. There, in spite of his original conviction that Christianity had never been known in China, Ricci soon became convinced that China could only be Cathay.

"All authors agree that the great kingdom of Cathay is found in these regions," he reported to the Jesuit Superiors in India; "lying east of Persia and south of Tartary. Yet in China no one knows anything about such a kingdom. It seems impossible that if it existed they should not have any relations with it, whether in peace or war. At least they would know of its existence."

Thus he concluded that China itself was Cathay. He was confirmed in this belief when he made contact with several Central

Asian merchants who had come overland to China and asked them by what name they called the country among themselves. Cathay, they replied. And did they have another name for its capital, Peking? Indeed, they said, among them it was called Cambalu.

This should have been proof enough. But belief dies hard. Communications were slow, Ricci could only present his arguments and conclusions by letter, and the evidence of returning Moslem merchants carried at least equal weight. Even the Jesuit Mission at the court of the Mogul Emperor Akbar, on the very fringe of Central Asia, remained convinced that two separate kingdoms existed and that Cathay was still ruled by the descendants of Prester John. It was in these circumstances that the Provincial of the Jesuit Order in India finally decided to try and settle the question once and for all by sending someone overland to the Cathay of the merchants to find out whether Father Ricci, known to be in China, was in that same land.

He could not send a mission, for any formal mission would almost certainly be denied entry at the Great Wall. Nor could he send anyone too obviously a Christian, for Mohammedan caravans crossing the desert were unlikely to accept a Christian travelling companion, and no one man could make the journey alone. His choice thus fell on one Benedict Goés, a Jesuit lay brother whose crossing of Central Asia is one of the least known and most heroic of the many journeys undertaken to link up East and West. Goés died in the shadow of the Great Wall, the barrier that finally prevented him from reaching his goal, but by the time he died he had already fulfilled his mission.

Goés was born in the Azores about 1561, became a soldier, and in his early twenties was stationed for some years with the Portuguese fleet off Travancore. His comrades there seem to have found him strangely different from themselves; pleasure-loving, wild, ready for any adventure, however dubious, he yet maintained a dignity and culture unusual among the soldiery. They came to the conclusion that he must be of good family and had probably left home because of some early scandal.

When he was about twenty-six something happened to change his entire life: some vision, some spiritual crisis which inspired him overnight to renounce the world he knew. He entered the Jesuit order as a lay brother, and a lay brother he remained, steadily refusing to take holy orders when urged to do so by his superiors. In 1594 he was sent with other Jesuits to the court of Akbar, a monarch as tolerant and as willing to hear different religions expounded as ever the Mongol Khans had been. There Goés became fascinated by Central Asia and the question of what lay beyond the deserts. He studied everything he could about the geography, religion and life

of the distant kingdoms of the north-east, talked to eastern travellers who visited the court of Akbar and became fluent in several Asian languages. He also became known among his colleagues for courage, judgment and, above all, tact.

Thus when the Jesuit Provincial decided to send some one individual to try and cross the Great Wall and enter Cathay in disguise, his choice naturally fell upon Benedict Goés. The expedition was to be financed by Philip III, and was supported by both the Portuguese Viceroy and by Akbar himself. The latter, who seems to have become very fond of Goés, presented him with four hundred pieces of gold, as well as letters and credentials for the early stages of the journey.

Deciding to travel as an Armenian merchant, Goés let his hair grow long, as they did, and adopted Armenian dress, wearing a long frock and a turban, and carrying a scimitar, a bow and quiver of arrows. He took the name of Abdulla, or Servant of the Lord, and in the autumn of 1602 he set off towards Lahore on the first stage of his travels with a small caravan of Mohammedan traders; he was accompanied by a Greek priest, a Greek merchant and an Armenian Christian named Isaac who was his personal servant.

The party reached Lahore slowly but without difficulty, and left there the following spring for Kabul. The road between the two cities was known to be infested with bandits and the ruler of Lahore obligingly provided the caravan with an escort of five hundred soldiers, but these fled at the first rumour of bandits; it was only after several narrow escapes, and by avoiding the main road, that the party finally reached Kabul. There they were delayed a further seven months by bad weather, and by the difficulty of finding another caravan going in the right direction to which they could attach themselves.

By that time the two Greek travellers had had enough. They found good reasons for turning back. Only Isaac the Armenian remained undaunted. Although his wife and family were in Lahore and he must have wondered whether indeed he would ever see them again, he made no difficulty about facing the perils that lay ahead.

Goés and Isaac, having at last succeeded in joining a Persian caravan bound for Central Asia, now followed a route very like that taken by the pilgrim Hsuan Tsang in the opposite direction nearly a thousand years earlier—from Kabul by Badakshan, Tashkurgan and Chicheklik to Yarkand. It was a nightmare journey. Crossing the Pamirs at a height of 18,000 feet, the travellers suffered frightfully from cold and blinding snow, and many of their horses were lost. Goés himself was almost killed when he stumbled into a deep crevasse in the snow, and was extricated with great difficulty. He was

now over forty, and unused to such hardships and extremes of cold. Nonetheless he and Isaac were both in good spirits and in reasonably good health when they arrived in Yarkand in November of that year.

They stayed in Yarkand through the following summer, resting and, as usual, looking for a caravan with which to travel. There they exchanged all their remaining gold for a commodity far more essential to any traveller or trader hoping to enter China : jade.

The Chinese love of jade is a characteristic which seems to have been shared by no other people. Jade, although an extremely hard stone and difficult to work, and although it is not found in China proper, was already in use in prehistoric China and it has never lost its popularity. According to Chinese legend, the best jade is nothing less than crystallized moonlight. It is also credited with magic and healing properties. Thus throughout the centuries jade, which Goés described as a "transparent kind of marble which we, from poverty of language, usually call jasper", was the most valuable substance which could be imported into the Middle Kingdom. The Son of Heaven himself would always buy fine jade. Slightly less valuable pieces commanded a high price among the aristocracy, and even poor jade was always in demand in the open market for fashioning vases, statues, belt-buckles and other ornaments.

Equipped with a quantity of this precious stone, Goés and Isaac set off again across the wilderness of Tartary, those demon-ridden deserts which were scarcely less perilous and terrifying in the seventeenth century than they had been two thousand years before. In one of the cities where they stayed, possibly Karashar, they encountered a west-bound caravan of Saracen merchants returning from Peking, where they had posed as foreign ambassadors. This was common practice among the enterprising merchants who succeeded in trading at the Ming court, where all commerce with foreigners was theoretically forbidden. The travellers would forge letters of credence from whatever king they chose to represent, and all their wares, their jade, their cloth, their clocks and other western curiosities, were labelled "tribute". These they would present to the Emperor and, since it was beneath the dignity of the Son of Heaven to accept tribute from barbarians without returning gifts of at least equal value, they would receive the equivalent in silks and other Chinese produce. The Chinese of course were well aware of the fraud, but it suited them to ignore it. They lost nothing by the exchange, and were enabled to pretend that the entire world was tributary to China.

Like all ambassadors, true or false, and indeed like all foreigners, the Saracens had stayed at a hostelry in Peking which was main-

tained by the government for visiting barbarians. They now told Goés that a noted European priest, a man skilled in the intricacies of the calendar and of eclipses, had been living at the same hostelry, and their description convinced Goés that the strange priest could be none other than Father Ricci. If he himself had ever doubted the identity of China and Cathay, he now knew the truth. The Saracens even showed him a scrap of paper covered with Portuguese writing which they had picked up in the hostelry and were keeping as a curiosity to show their friends at home.

But the Jesuit and his companion had yet to reach Cathay. After a month spent at Turfan, and another at Hami, they turned south across the arid wastes of the Gobi towards the Chinese frontier and Chiayükuān. Shortly before they reached the Wall, travelling by night to avoid the bandits who lay in wait there to plunder approaching caravans, Goés was thrown from his horse and lay unconscious for some time before Isaac noticed his absence and rode back in search of him. Weak from the hardships of the journey, emaciated from lack of food and water in the Gobi crossing, he could only with great difficulty cover the remaining distance to the Wall.

Seeing the towers of Chiayükuān, the gate of Cathay, seeing the Great Wall that had so long divided China from the rest of the world, Goés must have felt that he had reached his goal. The barren deserts there gave way again to vegetation, and pleasant valleys stretched inland from the Wall. There, many miles distant but undoubtedly within the same country, lay Peking and there Ricci awaited him.

Unfortunately the Wall had become more than a barrier of brick and stone. Entry into China and permission to proceed to the capital depended on the size of the "gift" which the aspiring traveller offered the Warden of the Gate, and by this time Goés' money and most of his jade were gone. He kept one large piece of jade hidden, knowing that without some such tribute he would never gain access to the Chinese capital, and presented all the rest to the Warden. Obviously dissatisfied, the Warden temporized. He would apply to the provincial Viceroy for permission for Goés to enter China, he said, but the Viceroy must have his share of the tribute, and it seemed unlikely that this would be sufficient to procure the permission. Moreover the number of caravans allowed to enter China was strictly rationed, and Goés' caravan must wait its turn. Another month went by. Finally the answer came that Goés could not be allowed to proceed to Peking. He could enter China, but no more, and must remain in the city of Suchou, immediately inside the Great Wall.

Goés and Isaac waited in Suchou for sixteen months. Neither

petitions, protests nor promises of future bribes could persuade the Viceroy to change his mind. Goés wrote again and again to Father Ricci to tell him of his arrival and enlist his help in getting out of Suchou, but his first letters apparently went astray because he had been unable to discover Ricci's Chinese name. One would have thought that foreign priests in China at that time were sufficiently rare to have been conspicuous, but the Chinese to whom Goés entrusted his letters never succeeded in delivering them; or perhaps they made no great effort to do so. Ricci meanwhile was inquiring among all the Moslem traders from Central Asia who found their way to Peking whether they had not seen or heard news of Benedict Goés, but he too was handicapped by not knowing Goés' Chinese name, and the latter was in any case still keeping up the pretence of being an Armenian merchant.

After many months one message did get through to Ricci. He at once despatched a young Chinese Christian, Chung Ma-li, baptized as Sebastian Fernandez, to try and bribe the frontier officials to release Goés. Fernandez, however, was robbed of all the money he was carrying long before he reached Suchou.

There in Suchou, within the shelter of that Great Wall he had struggled across two thousand miles to reach and which now he could not leave, Goés was dying. The strain of the journey, his two bad falls, lack of nourishing food, and his growing despair as the hopeless months went by, had weakened him beyond recovery. To get enough food for himself and Isaac he had had to sell his remaining jade for twelve hundred pieces of gold, scarcely half its value, and out of what he had bought and hidden away a few much smaller bits of jade, his last asset; in these lay his only hope of ever leaving Suchou.

One night in late March, 1607, he dreamed that a Jesuit brother from Peking had arrived in Suchou in search of him. Next morning he mentioned the dream to Isaac, and that same day Isaac and Sebastian Fernandez met in the market place. They spoke no common language, but each seemed to recognize in the other the person they were seeking, and Fernandez followed Isaac back to his master's bedside. Goés was beside himself with delight. His prayers were answered, and his dream fulfilled. Fernandez not only brought letters from Father Ricci; he had himself learned Latin and Portuguese from the Fathers in Peking and he was able to talk to Goés in his own language, to tell him about the capital and the life and work of the missionaries there, and to listen in turn to the traveller's account of his long journey.

Goés rallied for a few days, but the strain on his heart had been too great. He died a fortnight later, on April 11th, still clutching

Ricci's letter. Fernandez and the faithful Isaac, although they had neither Bible nor prayer-book, buried him with as much Christian ceremony as they could, telling their rosaries as they followed the narrow Chinese coffin to the grave and reciting prayers in their different languages as he was laid to rest. Neither record nor monument remains in Suchou to mark even approximately his grave. He is only one of the many forgotten travellers who have passed the gates of Chiayükuān in joy or in despair; one of the many whose fate was determined by the great barrier Wall. Yet the epitaph of his fellow-Jesuits was apt: "In seeking Cathay, he found Heaven."

Goés' diary was either stolen or lost in Suchou, quite possibly destroyed by the Mohammedans of the caravan with which he had last travelled because it contained a record of the various debts they owed to him. But other notes and letters he had written were preserved by Isaac, brought to Father Ricci, and included in the latter's *Commentaries*. He thus became the first European traveller across Central Asia since the time of Marco Polo who left an account of his journey; the first who knew that when he entered Cathay he had reached China.

Goés' death was followed by an epilogue both comic and heroic. It was the custom of the Mohammedans that if one member of a caravan died his property belonged to the others, and now the merchants with whom Goés had reached Chiayükuān some eighteen months before seized his few belongings, detained Isaac as Goés' servant, and brought a case against him in the Chinese courts. They claimed that he too was a Moslem, and that any bits of gold or jade he still possessed must have come from Goés and therefore now belonged to them. They also insisted that he had more jade hidden away, and demanded that he confess its whereabouts.

Isaac and Fernandez appeared in court together. By then Fernandez had learnt a little Persian, and Isaac a few words of Portuguese, but they could not talk to each other at all fluently, nor could Isaac make himself understood to the judges. Fernandez tried every argument he knew to convince the Chinese court that Isaac was a Christian and not a Moslem, and failed. They would have none of it. All foreigners, they said, were Moslems.

At last in desperation, when the court seemed bound to decide in favour of the merchants, Fernandez came into court carrying a leg of pork hidden in the sleeve of his gown, and offered this to Isaac. When the young Armenian started to eat it there and then the Moslems hastily rushed out of the room, cursing the infidels and swearing that the entire court would be defiled. The Chinese judge could only conclude that whatever this strange foreigner might be he was certainly no Moslem.

Sebastian Fernandez and Isaac, his few remaining bits of jade now restored to him, were thus free to set out on the long journey across China to the capital. They reached Peking a few months later. There Isaac was able to tell Father Ricci and his Jesuit brethren the whole story of the journey overland across Central Asia, of the heartbreaking delay at the frontier, and the death of Goés. He also presented them with the few remaining relics of his master, including the little paper cross which Goés had carried concealed in his belt in order not to attract the notice of his Moslem companions, and the sacred texts he had carried wound inside his turban; until a few years ago these relics were still to be seen in the Jesuit Mission in Peking.

But Isaac had no intention of remaining in the Middle Kingdom. He and his master had originally planned to complete their journey by sea, making doubly certain that the Cathay they had entered from the north was that same China they would leave from the south, and Isaac was determined to carry out this project. After a month's rest he set off once more, alone. And in the following year, despite a hazardous journey, storms, and near-disaster when he was actually captured by pirates, he returned to Agra.

The Jesuit Provincial's question was answered. A few diehard romantics might cling to the belief that another Cathay, a Christian kingdom, still existed in some unknown part of Asia. But no reasonable man could now doubt that Marco Polo's Cathay and the China newly discovered by the ships of Spain and Portugal were one and the same.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### LI TZU-CH'ENG

ALTHOUGH THE beginning of the year 1644 saw the Ming Dynasty still on the throne, two other dynasties were proclaimed during the course of that year, two other Sons of Heaven crowned in the Forbidden City of Peking. By the end of the year the Manchus, foreigners, "barbarians" from outside the Great Wall, were firmly established on a throne they were to hold for the next two hundred and sixty-seven years. But the story of how they came there, of how they took the Wall, is a curious one and worth telling. It was the last time in Chinese history that possession of the Wall determined the fate of China.

At the opening of the year a weak and decadent central government was threatened by two powerful enemies, one internal and one external. The hapless Emperor Ch'ung Chêng, who had given up all hope of controlling the eunuchs or of restoring loyalty to the throne, was chiefly, and perhaps mistakenly, concerned with the latter. He was making a last, desperate effort to hold back the barbarians who were threatening the Wall.

The menace of invasion now came from the north-east, where within the last fifty years a tribe related to the Nuchen Tartar Dynasty of four centuries before had become the strongest nomad power since the days of the great Khans. Their leader, Nurhachi, a chieftain who in many ways resembled Genghis Khan, had successfully united a number of single tribes into a nation, and had bestowed on them the name of Manchu. Other tribes in the north and north-west soon swore allegiance to them; by the early seventeenth century they had grown so powerful that even China, although maintaining a pretence of sovereignty, was paying the Manchus an annual subsidy of eight hundred ounces of silver and fifteen dragon robes to keep the peace.

The Manchus had various grievances against China, chief among them the Chinese refusal to make amends for the treacherous murder of Nurhachi's father and grandfather. Official records quote the long and apparently generous letters in which they offered to live in everlasting peace with their southern neighbour if only the latter would treat them as an equal, and would express regret for these murders. Since the records were published and the official history of the time compiled by the Manchus it may be that their

original intentions were not quite as peaceful as they were later made to appear. Nevertheless the Chinese do seem to have ignored every opportunity of maintaining by treaty a peace which they were increasingly unable to maintain by force of arms.

In 1618 Nurhachi formally burned a list of his grievances against the Mings, thereby transmitting them officially to Heaven, and in effect declaring war on China. The omens were favourable. The great jade seal which had been the special talisman of Genghis Khan, and which had been lost somewhere in the desert by the last Mongol Emperor of China when he fled before the Mings in 1368, was unexpectedly unearthed by a Mongol shepherd, whose chief-tain presented it to Nurhachi. This was interpreted, not unnaturally, to mean that the Manchus had inherited a divine right to the throne of China.

During the next twenty-five years Nurhachi and his successor raided north China almost at will. Once they occupied the Peking plain and the whole of Shantung, and were only prevented from establishing themselves there permanently and besieging the capital by the danger of being cut off from their own country by the Chinese armies stationed along the Great Wall. The Wall was still held by picked troops, disciplined, well-equipped, and under the command of an outstanding general of whom we shall hear more later: General Wu San-kuei.

Looking back now across the centuries of Manchu rule, it is easy to assume that their conquest of China was inevitable, that it followed the pattern so often followed in Chinese history of a strong power rising in the north and sweeping down to overthrow a weak dynasty in China. But at the beginning of that year 1644 the most immediate threat to the Ming Dynasty was not from the Manchus, or from the north. It was not the Manchus who were marching upon Peking, but a native conqueror, a warlord upon whom the Mandate of Heaven seemed beyond all doubt to have fallen. It was not the Manchus but Li Tzu-ch'eng who was fated to destroy the Mings.

Chinese believe the mark of greatness to be stamped so clearly in a man's features that it is possible to recognize future leaders by physiognomy alone. The classic example is that of Liu Pang, founder of the Han Dynasty in the third century B.C., who was only a petty official in a country town when one of the most influential men in the district chose him as his son-in-law, pointing out that his prominent forehead and aquiline nose guaranteed a great destiny. It is thus curious that the principal Chinese protagonists in these struggles of the mid-seventeenth century, Li Tzu-ch'eng and Wu San-kuei, both possessed that aquiline nose, an extremely rare feature in

China, which is believed to be the surest sign of a man born to power.

Li Tzu-ch'eng was tall, thin-lipped, with a prominent chin as well as a disproportionately large nose, scarred from an early age by smallpox, and described by those who knew him as a man with eagle eyes, a scorpion nose and the voice of a wolf. He was born about 1606 in Shensi, near Yenan, in that region west of the Yellow River which has fostered so many emperors and dynasties and from which new blood has so often come when the central government was weak; that same region where in modern times the Communists sheltered until they were ready to undertake the conquest of the country. It is a land of yellow, loess earth, a porous soil which wears away easily and leaves sunken roads deep enough for men and carts to travel along unseen, shut in by walls of earth on either side. It is a land extremely fertile when there is enough rain and quickly devastated in times of drought, such as recurred throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century. One version of Li's early life is that he was of poor parentage and during the lean years in which he grew up was driven by poverty into the hills, to a life of banditry. Other accounts say that he succeeded his father as village headman before he was twenty, and that it was some trouble with the authorities over the land-tax for which he was held responsible that caused him to turn brigand in 1629 or 1630.

Curious stories are told about the signs of favour bestowed upon Li Tzu-ch'eng by Heaven. Most of these were presumably apocryphal, but however much or however little truth there may have been in them the fact that the stories were current, and were widely believed, doubtless helped to convince his enemies and his adherents alike that he had received the Mandate of Heaven. The Chinese have always taken it for granted that omens, prophecies and natural phenomena were among the means by which the gods made known their will. Much of what we might dismiss as superstition was a genuine faith that they were in communication with Heaven. Li Tzu-ch'eng claimed, and quite probably believed, that he was simply the instrument chosen by Heaven to found a new dynasty.

A dwarf, not three feet high and therefore indubitably gifted with second sight, was said to have declared that the "Vessels of the Gods", vessels used by the Emperor, and the Emperor alone, in offering sacrifices to Heaven would come into the hands of Li Tzu-ch'eng. Li himself reputedly took an arrow from his quiver one hot, dusty day when he was out hunting with two comrades, planted it in the ground, and remarked: "If I am destined to ascend the Dragon Throne there will be such a snow-storm tonight that the shaft of this

arrow will be covered." By morning snow exactly reached the top of the arrow.

A stranger and perhaps to western ears incredible story is that which tells how Li Tzu-ch'eng when he was still young overheard a soothsayer observe that the son of whoever was buried inside the house of a certain wealthy merchant of the town would one day rule China, and at once decided that his own father must be buried in the house. This, being against all custom and precedent, was not easily accomplished. But Li managed it by persuading his father to commit suicide at the gate of the house in question, whereupon, weeping and bewailing his fate, he announced that only by burying the corpse inside the house itself could its owner prevent the dead man from returning to seek revenge.

Gruesome though this tale may be, it is not as unlikely as it sounds. If in China a man kills himself on another's doorstep the unfortunate householder will go to any lengths to appease the spirit of one whose death has been literally laid at his door. Otherwise it is believed that the unsatisfied ghost will not only haunt the premises, but may well ruin the entire family. As for persuading his father to commit suicide in the first place, it would only have been necessary for Li Tzu-ch'eng to convince him that if he did so he would thereby enable his son to become Son of Heaven. The father of an emperor is automatically entitled to the rank of emperor in the next world. He is as far above the ordinary spirits of the other-world as the Emperor is above his subjects in this world; whatever wealth and power his imperial descendants enjoy becomes his. To a people who take life in the next world as much for granted as life in the next village a few years of life more or less might seem a small price to pay for such a future.

A better authenticated story and one which certainly had a great effect on Li's fortunes was the apparent fulfilment of an old saying that, "In the Year of the Monkey a one-eyed man will be king." According to the twelve-year cycle of the Chinese calendar 1644 was the Year of the Monkey. And in about 1641 or 1642 an archer stationed on the wall of one of the cities besieged by Li Tzu-ch'eng recognized Li himself riding his favourite, piebald horse along the front lines, aimed carefully for his head, and shot out his left eye. Here, surely, was final proof that Li Tzu-ch'eng had received the Mandate of Heaven; he was the one-eyed king destined to rule China. Many former waverers, men who knew that the Ming Dynasty could not survive much longer and were ready to sell their allegiance to its most likely successor, rallied to Li's cause when it was known that he had lost an eye.

But by then he was already the most powerful of the warlords

who devastated China. His early career, despite the omens and despite his own self-confidence, had differed little from that of innumerable other more or less successful outlaws. Banditry had become endemic in China. Even in the more prosperous parts of the country the line between subsistence and starvation was quite simply the line between a good harvest and a bad. As happened so often towards the end of a dynasty, nature seemed to reflect the chaotic state of the government; or as the Chinese would say, Heaven's displeasure with the dynasty was shown by drought, flood and failing crops. A series of disastrous years had been followed by widespread famine, and famine had driven men into the only life that enabled them to survive, that of preying on their more fortunate neighbours. The ablest or the most ruthless among them often built up their own private armies and levied tribute from an entire district. Government officials usually found it wiser to ignore such activities. Nor was it uncommon for government troops, who might not have received any pay for years, to desert in a body to the outlaws.

It was only as the years passed that it became obvious that Li Tzu-ch'eng aspired to something more than this. Slowly but steadily he built up an army that was both stronger and better-trained than any other in the Middle Kingdom, with the possible exception of that of Wu San-kuei. His rivals either joined him or were murdered, or both. He seemed able to inspire a fanatical devotion among his followers. In the critical year of 1638, when for the first and last time a strong imperial army defeated him and he fled for his life into Szechuan, several of his officers are said to have killed their wives and children and destroyed everything that they possessed in order to prove to Li Tzu-ch'eng that no other ties would ever hold them back; that they would follow him anywhere, in success or in disaster.

By 1640 Li commanded some three hundred thousand men, two-thirds infantry and one-third cavalry. His armies were subdivided into units of ten men, in each of which one man was responsible with his life for the equipment, provisioning and behaviour of all. Discipline was severe. Death was the penalty not only for any lack of courage in battle, or negligence, but for such misdemeanours as riding unnecessarily across a ploughed field or bringing a woman into the camp.

The cavalry were the *élite*, for Li Tzu-ch'eng felt an affection for horses that he seldom extended to men; moreover it was his use of cavalry that enabled him to conquer the whole of the north-west so quickly, besieging one city after another and leaving pockets of infantry behind to invest any cities that held out while the cavalry

pressed on to new conquests. His horses were always well-fed and comfortably stabled, and those in the front line were equipped with iron breastplates. According to Li's enemies, they were also fed on human flesh and drank from troughs hollowed out of human corpses to accustom them to the smell of the battlefield.

The siege of K'aifeng finally decided the issue between Li and the imperial troops. Li first attacked the city in 1641 but retired after a few months, possibly because of the injury to his eye, or possibly because K'aifeng, with its fifty-foot walls, higher and stronger even than those of Peking, and its extensive outer fortifications, was too heavily defended. Returning in 1642 he laid siege to the city in the hope of starving it into submission. But at the end of nine months, in spite of a famine during which human flesh was sold openly in the markets at a price slightly higher than that of pork, while it was considered patriotic to throw the bodies of the dead into the streets to save others from starvation, K'aifeng was still holding out.

The strongest imperial army now remaining south of the Great Wall was sent to the relief of the city. Even these troops, however, were apparently afraid to face Li Tzu-ch'eng in open battle and instead they decided upon a dangerous, and as it proved disastrous expedient. K'aifeng stood only a few miles away from the Yellow River, being indeed below the level of that great torrent and only protected from flooding by two strong dykes. It occurred to the commander of the newly arrived army that if he were to breach these dykes the floods would force the besiegers to retire; he does not seem to have thought that it might also flood the city.

Li Tzu-ch'eng was warned by his sentries that the dykes were being cut, and the greater part of his army had already retired to high ground by the time the first flood water swept the plain. He lost some ten thousand men, a loss which must have seemed negligible in comparison with the fate of K'aifeng. For the fast-flowing waters of the river swept on past his encampments towards the city, undermined the north wall and flooded K'aifeng to a depth of something like twenty feet. Two hundred thousand people were drowned, the living and the dead alike buried under the waters of a huge lake, and when Li returned to take possession of the once great city he was rowed along its main street.

Li Tzu-ch'eng was now the undisputed ruler of five provinces. He modelled his government on that of Peking, held court with as much ceremony as his mobile life would permit, and appointed governors, magistrates and other civil officials to administer the cities and districts he had conquered. Destruction was to cease, he ordered, and the building of a new empire commence. The cruelties

and the atrocities by means of which he had terrorized the provinces into submission, the ruthless law by which he had equated the number of people to be massacred in each city exactly to the length of time the city held out, until after three days no man, woman or child was left alive, were no longer necessary.

Li is usually described as having been cold, calculating, cruel and completely indifferent to suffering. There is no reason to doubt that he was all these things, although perhaps no more so than other war-lords of the time. But he was shrewd enough to realize when the time had come to disavow the use of terror as a weapon. Throughout, he used whatever means he thought most likely to win him the throne. He had conquered north-west China by violence and intimidation; now he hoped to conquer the rest of the kingdom by good government, pacification, and constant reiteration of the claim that the Mandate of Heaven was his.

Meanwhile he chose his wife, Kao, with the same cold logic. She was the daughter of a senior official in one of the many cities captured by Li Tzu-ch'eng, and Li had been much impressed by the dignified, unhurried and completely fearless way in which her father had come to him in person and agreed to surrender the city.

"Why," Li Tzu-ch'eng had asked him, "why did you, an elderly man, and a scholar, not send some subordinate to settle the terms of surrender with me?"

"The more unpleasant the task, the less one should ask another to perform it," was the answer. "I could not have asked anyone else to deliver our city to you."

Li Tzu-ch'eng apparently came to the conclusion there and then that this man possessed all the qualities which he would like to see in his own sons, and he announced that if the scholar had a daughter he would marry her. Kao presumably had no choice in the matter. Nor does Li Tzu-ch'eng appear to have taken any interest in her except as the mother of the sons whom he expected to follow him upon the Dragon Throne. Her first son was almost immediately appointed Heir to the throne.

It might seem slightly premature to name an Heir to a throne that was not yet his. But on New Year's day, 1644, Li Tzu-ch'eng announced the founding of a new dynasty, to be called the Ta Shun or Great Obedient Dynasty, and was formally crowned Emperor. The ceremony took place in Hsi-an Fu, ancient Ch'ang-an, in that corner of the Wei and Yellow River where the Chou, the Ch'in, the Han and the T'ang Dynasties had all had their capitals. Li wore yellow, dragon-embroidered robes copied exactly from those of the Emperor, received the nine-fold kowtow from those to whom

he gave audience, and followed all the rites proper to the inauguration of a Son of Heaven.

He also announced the canonization of his ancestors in the spirit world, retroactive for seven generations. This was an essential step if the new dynasty were to be considered legitimate. It must also have given great satisfaction to his father's spirit if indeed there was any truth in the story that the elder Li had been persuaded to commit suicide by the promise of his son's future glory.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THE LAST OF THE MINGS

THIS THEN was the man who threatened Peking. Early in 1644 Li Tzu-ch'eng, styling himself Emperor, by divine right, of the Ta Shun Dynasty, called upon the Ming Emperor to surrender while there was still time and announced his own intention of entering Peking not later than the third month of that year. He had reason to be confident. Already many of his own soldiers, disguised as merchants and well supplied with silver to bribe eunuchs or court officials who might prove useful to them, were inside the capital. Already his spies reported that Peking was like a ripe fruit, his for the taking.

Li Tzu-ch'eng now marched north across Shensi and Shansi with the greater part of his army, divided into two mobile columns, crossed the inner loop of the Wall north-west of Peking and, by what seems a somewhat roundabout route, broke through the Wall a second time at Nankou Pass. Nankou, the fortress which had held out against the armies of Genghis Khan himself for over a year, was considered to be, and probably was, well-nigh impregnable but its commandant simply made a show of resistance, harangued his troops bravely, and deserted to Li under cover of darkness. Most of the garrison followed his example; the few who remained loyal to the Emperor fled eastward and joined Wu San-kuei's army at the far end of the Wall.

On the fourteenth day of the third month Li Tzu-ch'eng turned south again towards Peking. Four days later he had set up his camp outside the west wall of the city. There he ordered a magnificent tent erected for himself, and there he held audience as though he were already king, continuing to send messengers into the Forbidden City to demand the surrender of the unfortunate Emperor Ch'ung Cheng.

Peking was theoretically defended by a hundred and fifty thousand men, and the strongly fortified city should have been able to hold out indefinitely. But many of these supposed thousands were boys or old men, inadequately armed; others appeared on the payroll but did not exist; others again had already made up their minds to go over to the rebels at the first opportunity. Despite the formidable forty-foot walls of the city, with their double gates and their ninety-nine-foot towers, few people within the city itself expected the capital

to withstand a long siege. During the past year Ch'ung Cheng had again and again been on the point of recalling Wu San-kuei from the frontier to defend the capital, but each time he had thought better of it; he dared not leave the Wall undefended and the road to Peking open to the Manchus, for once the Manchus took the Great Wall nothing could keep them from the throne of China.

Now he had no choice. Only Wu San-kuei could possibly save the city. On the eighteenth of the month the Emperor sent messengers post-haste to the Wall with orders for Wu San-kuei to return immediately, leaving only a skeleton force behind to hold the Wall against the Manchus as long as possible. But it was already too late; and if he had not already realized it Ch'ung Cheng must have been forced to that conclusion before the end of the day.

That same night, accompanied by the eunuch Wang Ch'eng-an, one of the very few brave and incorruptible eunuchs in the whole of China's history, the Emperor rode out of the Forbidden City in a carriage from which the imperial dragons had been removed and made his way secretly to a small temple called San Kuan Miao, not far from the east wall of the city. There he attempted to read the will of Heaven by means of bamboo sticks; that is, by pulling out one bamboo stick from sticks of several different lengths held in the hands of the priest, the length of each stick having its own significance. The stick he chose now was the shortest. Its meaning, according to the priests, was clear. He had no alternative but to kill himself.

Legend tells how the unfortunate monarch cursed the temple, its priests and its gods, and how in fact San Kuan Miao thereafter fell on evil days, so that within a few years it had become a derelict and haunted ruin. Be that as it may, the Emperor returned to the Forbidden City only to discover that the commander-in-chief of the Peking garrison had personally opened a gate in the outer, or southern, wall to Li Tzu-ch'eng's men. It seemed inevitable that one of the gates in the inner city wall would be thrown open to them at any moment.

There was no time to lose. Ch'ung Cheng sent word to the Empress, to the Empress Dowager Precious Pearl and to his several hundred wives and concubines that they should commit suicide. In a last attempt to preserve the dynasty he ordered his sons, the Heir Apparent and two younger brothers, to dress in plain dark clothes and try to escape by one of the gates in the north or east wall before the rebels actually entered the city. He himself tried to kill his favourite daughter, a girl of fourteen, but he averted his eyes as he struck the blow and only succeeded in amputating her left

arm, crying as he did so, "Why were you ever born into this ill-starred house?"

Leaving the unfortunate girl unconscious on the floor, Ch'ung Cheng then hurried out of the throne room and made his way through the innumerable courtyards, gardens and pavilions of the Forbidden City until he came to the north gate of the palace. There he pushed open the great vermilion doors, crossed the moat and entered the grounds of Coal Hill, a high artificial mound built centuries before to protect the Forbidden City from the evil influence of the north wind. He was still followed by the faithful Wang Ch'eng-an.

Together the two men climbed a little way up the hillside. By that time it must have been nearly dawn, and they would have been able to see the whole city spread out beneath them, perhaps even to see where the armies of Li Tzu-ch'eng were camped outside the city wall. Ch'ung Cheng managed to tear a bit of material from the sleeve of the robe he was wearing, and on this he wrote a farewell message:

"I have occupied the throne for seventeen years, and rebels now insult me in my own capital. It is the judgment of Heaven. I alone am not to blame; the nobles who should have served me have destroyed me by hiding from me the truth. Yet how can I face my ancestors after death? With my hair dishevelled, my imperial cap removed, I leave my body to the conqueror. Let those who brought me to this sad state destroy it as they will. I consent. But let them not harm my people!"

It was long believed that Ch'ung Cheng hanged himself from one of the trees on Coal Hill, and until a few years ago a tree there was surrounded by chains, condemned to this punishment because it had supposedly been the instrument of the Emperor's death. Actually he seems to have killed himself in the pavilion at the base of the hill known as the "Imperial Hat and Girdle Department". The eunuch Ch'eng-an, afraid that the rebels might mutilate the body of the Son of Heaven, hurriedly changed his own clothes for those of his dead master. Then he too hanged himself from the beam of the roof.

Thus died the last Chinese Emperor ever to rule China, unless one accepts Li Tzu-ch'eng's brief rule as legitimate. The faithful eunuch need not have feared for his body. Both Li Tzu-ch'eng and the Manchu Dynasty that followed his paid great respect and honour both to the mortal remains and to the memory of the unfortunate Ch'ung Cheng. They could afford to do so now that he was dead; indeed each of the new Emperors claimed to be his spiritual and rightful successor.

Ch'ung Cheng's grave at the imperial Ming Tombs south of the Great Wall, in that geomantically perfect enclosure chosen long before by Yung Lo, was not yet ready. Li Tzu-ch'eng nevertheless saw to it even during his short reign that the last Ming ruler and his Empress were buried with as much pomp as could be hastily arranged in a tomb west of Peking which had originally been built for one of the imperial concubines. The first Manchu Emperor arranged for his reburial at the Ming Tombs. Later emperors, too, remembered him, not without some twinge of conscience, for it is said that once when K'ang Hsi was riding north to Jehol on a hunting expedition he stopped by the tomb of Ch'ung Cheng, prostrated himself, burnt incense, and addressed the spirit of his predecessor in the following words:

"You know, Great Emperor, it was not we, but your rebellious subjects who were the cause of your death."

His words were strictly true. It was not the Manchus but Li Tzu-ch'eng who made a triumphal entry into Peking that same morning, while Ch'ung Cheng lay dead on the slopes of Coal Hill. It was a cold April morning (still the third month according to the Chinese calendar), with frequent showers, but Li ignored the weather. He wore a gown of pale blue silk, with a gold sash and a gold-embroidered cap, and he was mounted on the same piebald horse he had ridden at the siege of K'aifeng. He rode slowly across the city, savouring his triumph.

Except for the few officials who had hurried to the gate to welcome him in the hope of winning favour, and his own bodyguard, the streets were empty. When he reached the marble bridge spanning the outer moat of the Imperial City, Li drew rein. On either side of him great stone lions stood guarding the entrance to the palace, and beyond these were two marble pillars carved with twisted dragons which were intended to guide the Son of Heaven along the paths of righteousness. Before him stretched the red walls and the gate towers of the Imperial City itself, walls which completely separated the city of the Emperor from the grey outer city encompassing it. Five archways, through the centre of which only the Son of Heaven was ever allowed to pass, led the way through the wall into the city.

He was in fact standing in what is now Red Square, looking up at that same terrace where Mao Tze-tung stands on May 1st and October 1st to review his troops and his people. There he could read the name of the gate inscribed in gilded characters: "T'ien An Men", Gate of Heavenly Peace.

Li fitted an arrow to the bow of carved horn he was carrying in his hand. "Do you see that character, 'T'ien'?" he said to the men

who stood silently behind him. "T'ien is Heaven, and it is by the will of Heaven that I am here. If I strike the character full centre it proves that the empire, All under Heaven, is truly mine!"

Li was a fine shot, reputed to be a better marksman than any man in his army, and the target was an easy one. Yet he missed, striking the arch well below the inscribed panel. This seems to have been the first time that any omen which he had deliberately invoked to confirm his right to the throne had given an unfavourable answer. His followers, as well as the renegade Ming officials who had joined their ranks, hastened to assure him that the position of the arrow meant that he had conquered the country from the south and had nothing to do with the Mandate of Heaven. But Li Tzu-ch'eng must have known better. He himself had challenged Heaven to show its approval, and he was undoubtedly badly shaken by the answer.

Other unfortunate omens were to follow, to Li's increasing dismay. Superstitious as he was, his self-confidence and his remarkable successes were undoubtedly partly due to a firm conviction that his will was the will of Heaven; once he lost that he lost half his strength.

It may be that the various signs and portents in which Li Tzu-ch'eng placed such faith did suddenly change for the worse as soon as he reached Peking. It is also possible that the change lay in Li's own state of mind. Having achieved his ambition and conquered the Dragon Throne, he was no longer so single-minded or sure of himself as he had been; he no longer looked towards one definite goal. With no clear vision of the future to inspire him, his own uncertainties may have been reflected in a corresponding uncertainty in the auspices he consulted. Whatever the reason, fortune does seem to have turned against him from the moment he entered the Imperial City.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE LAST CONQUEST OF THE WALL

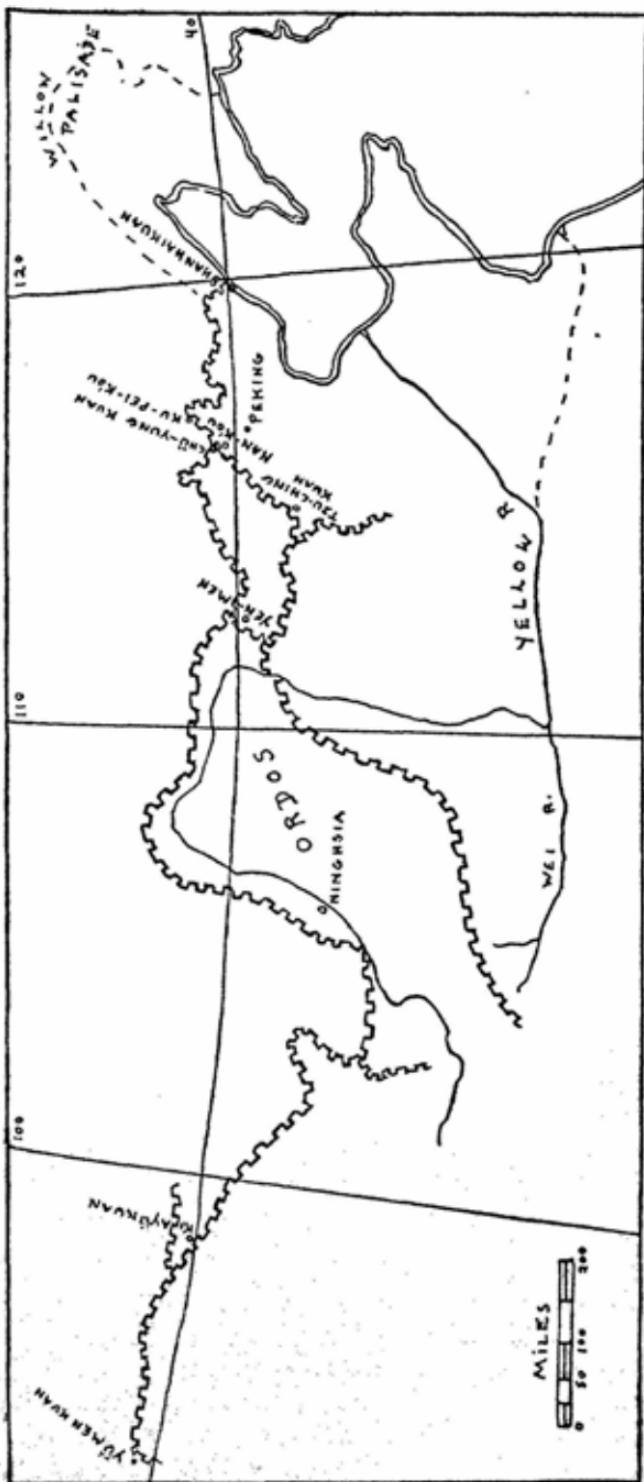
WU SAN-KUEI was a man of strong emotions and quick decisions, obstinate and not over-scrupulous where his own interests were concerned. He was a native of the Pale, that enclave of China in the Liaotung Peninsula which had been enclosed ever since the time of Mêng T'ien and Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, if not before, by a willow palisade serving as an extension of the Great Wall. His home, and possibly his sympathies, therefore lay in the border regions of China, adjoining the Manchu kingdom, rather than in the south. Physically he was thick-set, with a short neck and a head somewhat large for his body. His eyes were small; like his other features they were overshadowed by his nose, hooked and irregular in shape, with a dull purple birthmark across the bridge which changed colour when, as happened not infrequently, he was angry.

Morale among his troops, unlike that of the other imperial armies, was high and they were completely devoted to their leader. They were his men, not the Emperor's. And under his orders they had made the Great Wall, Shanhaikuan, and the outlying fortress of Ning Yuen, a formidable barrier. Wu San-kuei indeed had no doubt of his own ability to defeat the Manchus, given a free hand, and constantly fretted at the incompetence of the court, the conflicting orders which reached him from Peking, and the lack of reinforcements which would have enabled him to take the offensive. He probably under-estimated the strength of Li Tzu-ch'eng, even as Li Tzu-ch'eng under-estimated him.

In this crucial year of 1644, Wu San-kuei was still a comparatively young man. His life had been spent at the frontier, where his father before him had been commandant of Ning Yuen, and until recently his greatest if not his only interest had been the defence of the Great Wall. But during a visit to Peking shortly before he had attended a wine-party in the garden of a friend, and had there fallen in love at first sight with one of the singing-girls who entertained them. Her name was Ch'en Yuen Yuen, better known at court as the Round-faced Beauty, and she was indeed of great beauty.

His host apparently noticed his infatuation and was glad to have an opportunity of placing Wu under obligation to him, for Wu San-kuei was a man of importance at the court and a useful friend. The

PRINCIPAL GATES AND FORTRESSES IN THE WALL



Lady Ch'en was presented to Wu San-kuei forthwith, and entered the inner apartments of his household next day.

Wu San-kuei was undoubtedly grateful. His love for the Round-faced Beauty, however sudden, was no passing attraction. It was to remain the strongest emotion in his life. And it was for that reason that in the spring of 1644, when Li Tzu-ch'eng entered the Forbidden City, Wu's mind and heart were not altogether centred on affairs of state nor even on maintaining the Wall against the Manchus.

The events of the weeks immediately following Li Tzu-ch'eng's capture of Peking were confused. The timing of the correspondence which then took place between Li and Wu San-kuei, and between Wu San-kuei and the Manchu Prince Jui, or Dorgun, who acted as regent for the five-year-old Manchu Emperor, is doubtful, and the motives of the writers even more dubious.

Certainly one of Li Tzu-ch'eng's first thoughts was to come to terms with Wu San-kuei. Wu commanded the only effective fighting force in the Middle Kingdom which might still be used against him. He sent messengers to Shanhaikuan at once, and although his letter was written in the condescending terms of an Emperor to a soldier, and he pointed out that Wu really had no alternative unless he wished to be crushed between two enemies, he offered generous terms in return for the latter's support. He reinforced his arguments with a large gift of silver and a letter from Wu San-kuei's father, Wu Hsiang, whom he had taken prisoner. Wu Hsiang stressed the overwhelming strength of the usurper and urged his son to yield.

Wu San-kuei was willing to make peace. He may have been to some extent torn between loyalty to the dead Emperor on the one hand, and opportunism and filial piety on the other, but he was not of a temperament ever to sacrifice himself in a hopeless cause. He knew better than anyone else that he could not withstand both Li and the Manchus, nor could he defend the Great Wall without supplies from the capital. He replied to Li Tzu-ch'eng with an eloquent letter in which, after protesting his undying loyalty to the Mings and swearing that if he had only himself to consider he would immediately drive the rebels out of Peking at any cost, he went on to say that the thought of the Chinese people suffering great hardships in a continuing civil war appalled him and that he would therefore come to terms with Li on certain conditions.

He agreed to recognize Li Tzu-ch'eng as Emperor of the northern and western provinces, but reserved the right to offer his allegiance to the rightful heirs of the Ming Dynasty if they ever re-established themselves again in their original capital of Nanking. He demanded

that the Heir Apparent, Ch'ung Cheng's son, who had been captured in spite of his father's last-minute efforts to save him, be handed over to him immediately in proof of Li's good faith; and that his father, Wu Hsiang, retain his position and all his property in Peking. He also asked that his own concubine, Ch'en Yuen Yuen, should be delivered to him.

Li replied to these proposals by agreeing that Wu San-kuei should be free to recognize the Mings as rulers of the south if they ever secured a foothold there, which he thought most unlikely, and by confirming Wu Hsiang in his post and bestowing a new title upon him. He not unnaturally refused to hand over the Heir Apparent, which could only have served to incite the loyalists. He also refused to allow Ch'en Yuen Yuen to leave Peking. Instead he had her brought into the palace and placed among his own concubines.

Why Li, who was by all accounts of an austere, even puritanical nature and little interested in women, and who had seldom if ever allowed emotion to interfere with his decisions, should have taken such a risk for a girl whom he had presumably not seen remains a mystery. He may have been intrigued that at such a time, with the Son of Heaven dead and the country devastated by war, Wu's first thought should have been for a favourite concubine. It may have amused him to show his power by withholding her. Or he may have reckoned that she would be a useful counter in further bargaining with Wu.

According to one story Ch'en Yuen Yuen herself escaped from the city about the time that Li Tzu-ch'eng entered it, borrowed a horse, and set off in an attempt to reach Wu San-kuei's headquarters at the Wall. She was soon captured by a patrol of Li Tzu-ch'eng's troops. Seeing that she was beautiful, richly dressed and in obvious haste to leave Peking, they assumed that she must be a person of importance and brought her directly to Li in the Forbidden City.

It may be that, having her thus brought to his attention, Li Tzu-ch'eng was overcome with love for the Round-faced Beauty at first sight even as Wu San-kuei had been, and made up his mind to keep her in the palace regardless of consequences. But it seems unlikely. The new Emperor, arrogant and over-confident, apparently secure on the throne and contemptuous of one whom he considered no better than a score of other generals he had defeated, probably simply misjudged Wu San-kuei's feelings and the lengths to which he would go if necessary and light-heartedly risked his agreement with Wu for a whim.

When Wu San-kuei was informed that Ch'en Yuen Yuen had been taken into the Forbidden City and her name-tablet already placed among the name-tablets of Li Tzu-ch'eng's concubines he

flew into such a fury that none of his subordinates dared approach him, much less reason with him. He consigned the Emperor, his ancestors and his descendants, to the lowest halls of hell. He solemnly swore never to make peace with Li Tzu-ch'eng or the Ta Shun Dynasty under any circumstances whatever. Yet even in his rage he was too much the general to imagine that by vowing vengeance he could in any way alter the military situation; he was still caught between the rebel armies and the Manchus. Clearly there was only one answer. If he would not come to terms with Li Tzu-ch'eng he must come to terms with the Manchus, lifelong enemies though they might be.

"It has always been my intention to remain a bulwark to the empire, safeguarding the northern approaches to the capital," Wu San-kuei wrote that night, secretly, to Dorgun. "But I had not foreseen that the Palace might fall into the hands of traitors among our own people. Now the spirits of the former Emperors wander homeless; their shrines have been violated and there is no son to do them reverence. . . .

"Yet hope is not extinguished. Weak although he is, San-kuei has sworn to avenge his Emperor's death. With tears of blood, he therefore begs the prince of the north to come to his aid—and if the kingdom of the north aids that of the south, could we offer only riches in reward? The very skin of our foreheads we would lay at your feet. By the nine heavens, I speak the truth."

The invitation was clear enough. Wu San-kuei later insisted somewhat half-heartedly that he had only intended the Manchus to help him drive out Li Tzu-ch'eng, assuming that they would then be willing to retire and to allow a scion of the Mings to return to the throne. But he must have known better. He above all others knew the full strength of the new barbarians. He knew that once they were assured of a free passage through the Great Wall the Manchus would occupy China and would never voluntarily give it up again. He had made his decision: the Manchus were preferable to Li Tzu-ch'eng. To do him justice, however, although it was certainly the loss of Ch'en Yuen Yuen that determined his choice, Wu San-kuei may have regarded the Manchu cause more favourably than most other Chinese would have done at that time; to the extent that he had been born and bred in the Pale he was himself a northerner.

Wu San-kuei's appeal took the Manchus by surprise, with only seven thousand men available. But they did not hesitate. The seven thousand were on their way to Shanhakuan almost before Dorgun had finished composing a flowery answer to the Chinese general, in which he swore eternal friendship with the Chinese, and Tartar

marching horns were quickly sounded across the deserts of Mongolia and the mountains of Manchuria to call up reinforcements.

The Manchu armies could be mobilized overnight. Like their predecessors in the lands north of the Great Wall ever since the time of the Hsiung-nu, and before, they moved with a speed completely incomprehensible to the Chinese. Carrying neither baggage nor provisions, sleeping in the open with only their saddle blankets for cover, they lived off the country where they could and on the flesh of their spare horses if necessary. So much did they distrust the habits of civilization that if they did find it convenient to occupy buildings for a short time they would often knock down the walls and leave only the pillars and the roof standing.

Meanwhile Wu San-kuei had abruptly broken off negotiations with Li Tzu-ch'eng. Li does not seem to have heard news of Wu's secret overtures to the Manchus, for instead of fortifying himself in the capital as he should have done if faced by the threat of their combined armies, he immediately set out for Shanhaikuan with almost the whole of his army to force the issue. And he marched with such careless self-assurance that he, who had once condemned soldiers to death for introducing women into their camp, seemed undisturbed by an unruly, mile-long train of camp followers. He also took with him the Ming Heir Apparent, his prisoner, apparently confident that there was no danger of his escaping or being rescued on the battlefield.

As long as he thought he had only Wu San-kuei to deal with, Li had every reason to be sanguine about the forthcoming battle. His army was far larger than that of Wu. His men were veterans of a hundred campaigns. Equipped with coats of "mail" made by folding layer upon layer of padded silk one above the other, which were proof against arrows and even bullets, and mounted on the finest horses in the country, they had already met and defeated every other army in the Middle Kingdom.

Li Tzu-ch'eng took up his position in Stony Valley, an opening in the foothills south of Shanhaikuan. There he spread his men out across a wide front, ordering the centre to yield slightly under Wu San-kuei's expected attack and draw back, thus luring the enemy into a position where the flanks could close in and cut off his retreat.

Wu fell into this trap with apparent *naïveté*. Next morning, having harangued his men with a fiery denunciation of the usurper, but without apparently mentioning the promised Manchu help, he marched out from the fortress of Shanhaikuan and fell recklessly upon the rebel centre. They retreated before him but as he pressed his advantage Li Tzu-ch'eng's wings moved forward, swung inward, and almost succeeded in encircling the enemy forces.

At that moment, presumably at a prearranged signal, the Manchu cavalry which had hitherto remained hidden in the hills just inside the Great Wall made their appearance. They charged at full gallop down the valley, stones flying under their horses' hoofs, shouting as they came. Wu San-kuei's soldiers held their ground and the wild horsemen galloped past them on either side and threw themselves against the main body of Li Tzu-ch'eng's army.

Seasoned troops although they were, and unquestionably brave, Li's men panicked. It was not only that they were taken by surprise. These helmeted warriors surging down from the hills with their swords bare were quite unlike any foe they had ever faced, and in the dust and confusion it must have seemed to them that they were fighting not men, but demons. The fierce, uncontrollable spirits of the north seemed to have broken through the Great Wall at last.

Li Tzu-ch'eng and a few others near him held their ground as long as they could and tried to rally their men, but it was hopeless. Men and horses alike fell over each other in their haste to escape. Arms and equipment were abandoned on the field, and hundreds of the unfortunate camp-followers were trampled underfoot by fleeing cavalry. Pursuers and pursued galloped for over fifteen miles that afternoon. And at last it was the Manchus who abandoned the chase and turned back, eager to gather up the huge booty of camels, mules, carts and weapons with which the battlefield was strewn.

Li Tzu-ch'eng could not hope to hold Peking against the Manchus and Wu San-kuei together, especially as Wu had many friends within the capital, and no sooner had he led his shattered army back into the city than he made plans to abandon it and retire westward. Not that he intended to give up his claim to the throne. On the contrary, he hastily arranged for a second coronation ceremony to take place in the great throne room of the Forbidden City, apparently convinced that if he were once crowned Son of Heaven in Peking itself the dynasty he had founded would endure.

His coronation was followed by the mass execution of several hundred former officials of the Ming Dynasty, including those who had surrendered the capital to him; he was ready to take advantage of other men's cowardice but he despised it none the less. Wu San-kuei's father and thirty-six members of his family were also executed, and one of the first things Wu and the Manchus saw when they reached Peking a few days later was Wu Hsiang's head displayed on a pike at the north gate of the city. Only Ch'en Yuen Yuen was spared. Whatever Li's original feelings towards her had been, she was now a useful hostage, and Li decided to take her with him when he left Peking.

Li Tzu-ch'eng's highly disciplined troops had caused little damage

to Peking when they entered the city some weeks before. The conqueror had intended it to be the capital of the new dynasty, as of the old, and had no wish to rule over a ruined city; the soldiers were kept under strict control. Now that was changed. His capital must be located elsewhere. And he gave orders that so long as the army was ready to leave the west gate at dawn next morning they could do as they liked meanwhile. He stipulated only that any gold or silver found in the city must be brought to him in the palace, and there he supervised the melting down of these precious metals into large, flat discs weighing about a thousand ounces each. These discs, some ten thousand in all, were then loaded on mule carts in preparation for the next day's march. They were to provide the foundation of the new kingdom which Li hoped to establish in Shensi and the western provinces.

On the following morning the retreating army, led by Li Tzu-ch'eng on his piebald horse, moved slowly south-west along the fringe of the Western Hills. A baggage train of heavily laden carts, camels and horses stretched out for miles behind them, for the soldiers had taken Li at his word and plundered everything they could lay their hands on, from bird-cages to kitchen utensils. They had also set fire to parts of the city but fortunately there was no wind and for the most part the fires, hastily laid, were easily extinguished.

Within twenty-four hours Wu San-kuei and his Manchu allies entered Peking. Some surviving officials of the Ming court who hurried to receive them were apparently under the impression that Wu San-kuei was escorting the Ming Heir Apparent into the city and that the dynasty would be restored. If so, they were soon disillusioned. From the beginning the Manchus made it clear, tactfully, politely but very firmly, that they regarded themselves as the rulers of China. To remove any possible friction between the victorious armies, they "suggested" that Wu San-kuei and his troops should immediately press on towards the west in pursuit of Li Tzu-ch'eng.

Once he learned that the Round-faced Beauty had been carried away by the rebels, Wu was by no means reluctant to go. He quickly caught up with Li Tzu-ch'eng's rearguard and the first of many battles ensued. Both sides fought bravely and well and by nightfall the outcome was still undecided, but Li knew that his hard-pressed soldiers were in no condition to fight again the next day, and he retreated during the night. So it went on day after day; skirmishing, retreat, pursuit.

Within a few days Li Tzu-ch'eng was forced to give up the strongest weapon he had against Wu, and to exchange Ch'en Yuen

Yuen for the time he needed to make good his escape into Shensi. Whether he bargained with Wu, or whether he simply gambled on his enemy's reactions, the result was the same. He left Ch'en Yuen Yuen waiting on the bank of a river he and his men had just crossed, and Wu San-kuei reached the same river only a few hours later.

Had there been any doubt as to Wu San-kuei's reason for defying Li Tzu-ch'eng and throwing in his lot with the Manchus, thus enabling a foreign dynasty to ascend the throne of China, his behaviour now made it plain. Once reunited with Ch'en Yuen Yuen, he made no effort to hinder Li Tzu-ch'eng's retreat. Despite his vows of vengeance to the death, despite the pleas of his officers and men, who saw an exhausted and richly-laden enemy escaping before their eyes, he camped there on the banks of the river and there he remained. It was only when rumours of this sudden halt reached Peking and Dorgun sent an army of his own under command of a Manchu noble to investigate that the pursuit was resumed. Even then Wu took no part in it. Pleading illness, he returned to Peking with Ch'en Yuen Yuen. (It is said, however, that the Round-faced Beauty felt herself contaminated by her contact with Li and later insisted on entering a convent.)

Wu San-kuei now made a belated effort to persuade the Tartars to retire, taking with them as much gold, silver, silk and as many girls of marriageable age as they wished. But Dorgun simply smiled.

"Great General," he said, "how could we deserve your gratitude if we were to abandon you now, with the empire not yet pacified?"

Wu San-kuei made the best of his bargain by insisting that the Manchus accept four conditions: that Chinese women should not adopt Manchu dress nor cease to bind their feet; that even if Chinese men wore Manchu dress and a queue during their lifetime, they were to be buried in the costume of the Mings; that no Chinese woman should be taken into the imperial harem; and that the chief scholar of the kingdom, chosen every three years, should never be a Manchu. The new rulers must have considered this a small price to pay for the throne. Wu San-kuei himself was rewarded with the triple-eyed peacock feather, and in 1659 he was appointed one of the three Feudatory Princes of the empire and granted large estates in the south.

Yet Wu San-kuei cannot have been altogether at ease with his allies. He is said to have commented ruefully that in 1644 he had called in lions to help rid himself of dogs. And many years later he rebelled and set up an independent kingdom in the south. Even after his death his sons and grandsons refused to accept Manchu rule there, and it was not until 1681 that their last stronghold was captured by the Manchu armies. Thereupon the entire family was

exterminated and Wu San-kuei's body was exhumed and scattered to the four winds.

And Li Tzu-ch'eng? His desertion of Ch'en Yuen Yuen secured him five days' grace from pursuit, but that was all. He was constantly hampered by the slow-moving carts carrying his gold and silver, and eventually he threw the entire treasure into one of the rivers they crossed, hoping to retrieve it later, and piled the empty mule-carts up in a futile attempt to stall his pursuers. One by one his men were killed off in skirmishes, or deserted to the hills, or died of disease and hunger. By the time he reached the promised land of Shensi he had only a few score followers. The governors, the generals, the magistrates he had left in command of the five provinces had meanwhile either gone over to the Manchus or been driven out. He found himself without men, without money, without even a single loyal city in which he could take refuge.

The official version of Li Tzu-ch'eng's death is that he and a few others raided a village in Hupei, where the villagers attacked and killed them. Later they noticed that the leader of the ruffians had apparently had only one eye, concluded that this must have been Li Tzu-ch'eng, and reported his death to the capital. The report may well have been true. On the other hand the new Manchu régime was anxious to announce Li Tzu-ch'eng's death, whether or not he was dead, and so put an end to rumours that he might return; it was to be many years before the superstitious awe in which the name of Li Tzu-ch'eng was held died down, and the Manchus would certainly have welcomed any opportunity of laying his ghost.

The more romantic version is that Li Tzu-ch'eng finally dismissed the handful of followers who had remained faithful to him and made his way alone into Hupei. There, near Buffalo Mountain, he entered a remote Taoist temple perched high on one of the cliffs and asked to become a monk. The priests may well have been startled by his appearance but there would be no reason why they, deliberately withdrawn from the world, should have suspected his identity, nor why they should have refused him admittance even if they had.

Li Tzu-ch'eng is said to have lived in the monastery for over twenty years, dying peacefully at the age of seventy, and to have been considered a very holy man. A dagoba erected over what is believed to be his tomb still stands in the graveyard there, with the inscription: "None knows the family name nor the origin of the priest who lies buried here."

There can have been few men in China's history who accomplished so much in so short a time as Li Tzu-ch'eng, only to see the whole structure collapse even more quickly than it had been built,

and for the flimsiest of reasons. But for the fortuitous influence of the Round-faced Beauty it is quite possible that he would have succeeded in consolidating the Ta Shun Dynasty. Historians revile him, dwelling on his faults and his cruelty. Yet already before he captured Peking, Li had turned from conquest to administration, from force to lawful government. He had many of the qualities of a ruler, and there is no reason to believe that if he had held the throne for a few years the Great Obedient Dynasty might not have survived.

The Manchus might still have forced the Great Wall and conquered China even against the opposition of Wu San-kuei, but it is unlikely that they could have done so in 1644 without his help. Had the opportunity not arisen then, a new Chinese dynasty might have grown strong enough to hold the Wall against them. As it was the last crucial episode in the history of the Wall as a barrier was decided not by its weakness or its strength but by the beauty of a woman. The Manchus, it has been said, "owed their dynasty, under Heaven, to the little singing-girl known to contemporary chroniclers as Lady Ch'en, the Round-faced Beauty."

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### AN EPILOGUE

THE MILITARY significance of the Great Wall in Chinese history died with the Mings. The descendants of the Tartar tribes against whom it had been built, and for centuries maintained, had become the government of China. The great fortresses still looked down upon the lands of north and south, but both alike were ruled by barbarians from outside the Wall. The frontier became less definite; Manchus entered China in considerable numbers, many of them to fill administrative positions at the court, while Chinese from Hopei and Shantung migrated into Manchuria.

The great rampart none the less maintained its position as the boundary of China proper, and as a dividing line between two worlds still basically alien to each other. Not only were Chinese who died beyond the Wall brought back to their own lands for burial, but many of the Manchus who died within China were taken back to Manchuria and laid to rest among their own people. Garrisons were still maintained along the Wall, and permission was still needed to cross from one country to another. China was still the Middle Kingdom, and her frontier was for the most part still delineated by the Wall.

Parts of the Great Wall still played an important part in local history. Throughout the Manchu Dynasty an inner section of the Wall some fifty miles west of Peking, where the Great Dragon Gate and the Little Dragon Gate stand sentinel among the mountains, served as one of the boundaries of a lozenge-shaped area roughly eighteen miles by ten in which several thousand people were isolated. This curious community is believed to have been founded by three hundred deserters from Li Tzu-ch'eng's retreating army who fled into the hills there in 1644. Lack of food and shelter eventually forced them to surrender to the Manchus, and the latter, while granting them their lives, condemned them and their families to permanent exile in the same rough country where they had taken refuge. Their lands were enclosed on three sides by steep mountains, with the Great Wall forming their north-west boundary, and a barrier was built across the only valley, opening out towards Cho Chou in the south, which would have provided easy access to the area. Certain restrictions were also imposed on the exiles. Their women in particular were required to dress their hair in a peculiar

manner—looped at the back like a bow, or the handle of a teapot, and bound with red cord—to distinguish them from other women.

Until 1911 these hill people never left their own lands, except that once a year the Elders of the different villages would go down to Cho Chou to pay their taxes. With the coming of the Republic they were set free, and indeed their origin had long since been forgotten. Yet even now very few of them travel far from their own valleys, and until at least a few years ago their customs and their manner of speech varied considerably from that of even neighbouring districts and the women still wore their hair in the distinctive "teapot" style.

Probably it is changing now. Certainly it will change. The women's hair will be cut short, the Elders will be replaced by enthusiastic "activists" trained in the capital, and their curious differences of language and custom will disappear. Yet the two Dragon Gates of the Wall will continue for a while to look down on the lands of this so-called Lost Tribe. No longer used as watch-towers, falling now into ruin, the towers still recall the last flight of Li Tzu-ch'eng and that crucial year of 1644, the year which saw the end of the Great Wall as a barrier.

Foreign though it was, the Manchu Dynasty served China well. Under the first hundred and fifty years of its rule the Chinese empire expanded, its population increased, and it enjoyed a prosperity greater than ever before. It was not surprising that the Manchu Sons of Heaven looked down on all the world, or that they believed the few westerners who were allowed to enter China to be of an inferior race, uncouth barbarians bringing tribute. Supreme in their own lands, they dismissed the outer world with contempt, a blindness which was to prove their undoing in the end.

The Emperor K'ang Hsi, son of the young prince who had been placed on the throne in 1644, extended Manchu sovereignty over the tribes of Mongolia and far west into Tibet. In his expansion he eventually came face to face with the Russians in the Amur valley, and for some time there was intermittent fighting over the boundary between them, complicated by the fact that there were no adequate maps either of Siberia or the outskirts of the Chinese Empire. A treaty defining the boundaries of the two great powers' spheres of influence was signed at Nerchinsk in 1689, the first pact in modern times to be made between China and a western power.

K'ang Hsi's grandson, Ch'ien Lung pushed, still further westward, even as far as Nepal. Once again, this time under "barbarian" rule, the strong position in the north and north-west that was the lifelong objective of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, Wu Ti, Yang Ti of Sui, and other strong rulers, had been achieved.

As far as the Chinese and Manchus were concerned the far West and the Western Region of Central Asia nevertheless remained alien lands. A pathetic episode in the long and brilliant reign of Ch'ien Lung was his love for the wife, or widow, of the Mohammedan ruler of Yarkand. Her husband was killed in one of the Manchu Emperor's campaigns far beyond the Great Wall, and the princess was brought back to Peking, where she became known in the Inner Courts of the palace as Hsiang Fei, the Fragrant Concubine. She was of great beauty, and Ch'ien Lung fell in love with her from the moment he first set eyes on her. Far from returning his love, however, Hsiang Fei refused even to speak to the Emperor and neither threats, bribes, nor promises of his undying devotion had the slightest effect upon her.

One day, after she had already been at court for two years, Ch'ien Lung found her weeping on the occasion of the Moslem New Year. Suddenly he realized that she was still a stranger, alien and forlorn, in this world of his, and came to the conclusion that perhaps her melancholy was only the result of homesickness. To console her he built a mosque, a Turkish bath, and an entire street of Moslem shops and houses just outside the wall of her pavilion, so that if she looked out she might believe herself once again in her remote homeland, and so that she could sometimes walk through streets reminiscent of that other life she had been forced to leave.

Even this was in vain. The Fragrant Concubine continued to pine away. At last, when the Emperor was away from the Forbidden City for two days, carrying out the traditional ceremonies of the Winter Solstice at the Temple of Heaven, the Empress Dowager summoned the Mohammedan Princess to her apartments and pointed out to her that she must make up her mind. The present situation was unfair to herself and to the Emperor. Either she should accept his love and become Senior Concubine, or she should take her life. Apparently delighted, Hsiang Fei expressed her thanks to the Empress Dowager and hanged herself from one of the beams in the Empress's apartments.

Ch'ien Lung never recovered from his loss. Years later he still used to visit the little mosque outside the palace, the symbol of his hopeless love for a foreigner. (Services were held in the mosque as late as 1908 but the building was pulled down in 1913 by Yuan Shih Kai, first president of China, because it overlooked the Forbidden City.)

The Great Wall was not altogether neglected in the years of expansion. Sentry posts were maintained there until early in the twentieth century. The Manchu Emperors, especially K'ang Hsi, used to ride through the pass at Kupeikou when travelling to the

imperial hunting grounds in Jehol, and would sometimes dismount and inspect the guard there. One of the two imperial graveyards of the Manchus, like that of the Mings, was built near the Wall to take advantage of its protection against unfriendly spirits. A number of the cannon cast under the supervision of the Jesuit missionaries were mounted on the Wall.

The position of the Jesuits in Peking had been improved by the fall of the Mings and the coming of the Manchus. Adam Schall and his mission were in some danger during the brief and turbulent reign of Li Tzu-ch'eng, when all foreigners were suspect, but from the very beginning they were well treated by the Manchu rulers. Schall was allowed to offer a petition that the mission might continue its work to the Regent in person, and the latter was apparently much impressed by the Jesuit's long white beard. He was more impressed when the missionaries shortly foretold an eclipse of the sun which was not mentioned in the imperial calendar. In 1645 Schall was appointed Director of the Astronomical Board.

But a knowledge of cannon was more valuable than a knowledge of eclipses. Before the fall of the Ming Dynasty Ch'ung Cheng had already ordered Adam Schall to set up a foundry for casting cannon near the palace, and twenty cannon had been cast, each capable of throwing a forty-pound shot, as well as lighter guns which could be transported on carts or on the shoulders of two men. Ch'ung Cheng, vainly hoping that these miraculous foreign weapons might yet save the dynasty which his own armies could no longer defend, ordered them to be set up on the city wall and wrote inscriptions in vermilion in his own handwriting to be copied upon each weapon.

Now Schall and his successor, Verbiest, performed the same service for the Manchus. Quite apart from the difficulty of refusing to comply with the Emperor's wishes, it seemed to them a useful way of introducing Christian workmen into the palace and attempting to spread the gospel. Models of a new type of cannon were presented for K'ang Hsi's approval in 1681, and a year later a number of completed weapons were delivered. Before being sent to the Wall they were taken to the foot of the Western Hills, there to be tested in the presence of the Son of Heaven himself, his Ministers and senior officials. The experiment was a great success. When K'ang Hsi discovered that these wonderful weapons not only discharged cannon balls but that the balls could actually hit specified targets he was so delighted that he took off his fur-lined vest and gown and presented them to Verbiest there and then as a token of his appreciation.

Verbiest was determined to make this new venture serve his religion. On a specially chosen auspicious day he blessed the cannon,

erecting an altar and a crucifix in the foundry and prostrating himself nine times before it, thus making clear to the Chinese that the credit for the weapons was due not to himself but to God. Then he bestowed on each cannon the name of a Saint, and inscribed characters to that effect along their barrels.

The Jesuits' interest in the Great Wall was not confined to cannon for its defence. Under K'ang Hsi, from about 1706 to 1717, various Jesuit fathers travelled from one end of the Wall to the other, from the sea to the Central Asian outposts, measuring and mapping it. Using compasses and solar observations to calculate their direction and their latitude, they measured the entire length of the rampart as it then stood by means of marked cords. Day after day they paced along it, night after night they camped beside it, pitching their tents close under its inner face for protection from the north wind. Their completed map was some fifteen feet long, and showed not only every gate in the Wall but also the free-standing watch-towers and the outer fortifications as well.

Now, in the twentieth century, the Wall has shrunk in importance until it is a jagged line on the maps of China, and little else. The overthrow of the Manchus and the establishment of the Republic of China were quite unaffected by the Wall, as were the victories of the Chinese Peoples' Republic. Occasionally the Wall might still be a useful line of demarcation, as when the Japanese agreed in May, 1933 to withdraw north of the Great Wall if Chinese troops were withdrawn from the area between Peking and the Wall. But that was all.

The Wall now retains its interest only for the tourist, and it is as a tourist attraction that parts of it are still being repaired and kept in order. Visitors to China under the Communist Peoples' Republic no less than under the Kuomintang Government of Chiang-Kai-Shek, make their pilgrimage to Nankou Pass and stand in wonder before the grey serpent that twists its way from mountain peak to peak. They climb to the first fortress, perhaps the second if they are energetic and are not being herded together by their guides, and from there look far beyond the Wall and the mountains to the beginnings of the Mongolian plateau.

There indeed they may find ghosts of the past. Phantom soldiers defending the passes against the Hsiung-nu, Mongol hordes sweeping down the valleys, an Emperor besieged in the stronghold of his own Wall; even the poet who stood on the highest tower near Nankou and found himself so near Heaven that he climbed the rest of the way on a moonbeam. More likely, they will find the ghosts of those whose hands actually built the Wall, the spirits of those nameless workers who toiled, generation after generation, building grey

bricks on grey bricks into such a fortification as no other nation has dreamed of. There above all they will find the brooding spirit of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. For however much one may argue about the date of a particular section of the Wall, or recall the walls that existed centuries before the Great Universal Emperor and the work done by the Mings centuries later, the credit for the Great Wall as a single magnificent rampart, a single continuous boundary dividing all that was included in the Middle Kingdom from all that lay outside it, must belong to him.

## TABLE OF CHINESE DYNASTIES

### DYNASTY:

### DATE:

(approximate in the case  
of the earliest dynasties)

Hsia	2000-1500 B.C.
Shang, or Yin	1500-1028 B.C.
Chou	1027-255 B.C.
Period of the Contending States (still officially the Chou Dynasty)	403-221 B.C.
Ch'in (although the Ch'in conquest of China was not completed until 221 B.C.)	255-206 B.C.
Han	206 B.C.-A.D. 220
The Three Kingdoms	220-265
Western Chin	265-317
Eastern Chin	317-420

### The Division between North and South:

#### Northern Dynasties:

Northern Wei	385-535
Eastern Wei	535-550
Western Wei	535-557
Northern Ch'i	550-577
Northern Chou	557-580

#### Southern Dynasties:

Liu Sung	420-478
Southern Ch'i	479-501
Liang	502-556
Ch'en	557-588

Sui	590-618
T'ang	618-906
The Five Dynasties	906-960
Sung	960-1279

(During the period of the Five Dynasties and the Sung Dynasty the greater part of north China was ruled by two Tartar dynasties:

Khitian, or Liao	907-1125
Nuchen, or Chin	1125-1235

Yuan, or Mongol	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Ch'ing, or Manchu	1644-1911

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